







LIFE AND SPEECHES

OF

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

JOHN BRIGHT, M. P.



**Ballantyne Press**  
BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.  
EDINBURGH AND LONDON





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THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

JOHN BRIGHT, M.P.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF THE RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE, M.P."

*WITH GALLERY OF PORTRAITS OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES  
ETCHED BY CHARLES LAURIE.*

VOLUME I.

LONDON:  
THOMAS C. JACK, 45 LUDGATE HILL  
EDINBURGH: GRANGE PUBLISHING WORKS.

1884



## LIST OF PORTRAITS.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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IN the long and distinguished annals of English statesmanship, there is no name that more worthily challenges admiration than that of the great tribune of the people, John Bright. His unswerving fidelity to conscience, and his unwearied efforts for the welfare of his countrymen, have given him a high place in the people's roll of honour. Amongst the great movements with which he has been closely identified, were the repeal of the Corn Laws, the repeal of the Navigation Laws, and the liberation of the Tariff from excessive and Protectionist duties. These were acts closely connected with the trade and commerce of the nation; but his name again has been synonymous with freedom in India, the liberation of knowledge from its fiscal fetters, and the removal of that ancient anomaly, the Irish Church. Amongst all our public men, moreover, there has been no greater or more steadfast friend to the cause of Parliamentary Reform.

The present work completes a task which the author has long been desirous of accomplishing. That task, although.

laborious, has been congenial, and he trusts that the result of his labour will not go altogether unappreciated by the English speaking race at home and abroad. His object was to compile full and adequate accounts of the public career and speeches of the greatest Liberal statesman, and the greatest Liberal orator, of the nineteenth century. Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Bright stand, as public men, in a position so exceptional, that no apology is needed for relating the story of their lives while they are still amongst us, especially as the author has not presumed to pass judgment upon their labours and character. His desire has rather been to collect for the reader accurate and exhaustive materials upon which he may base his own political, personal, and historical estimates.

In the history of Liberalism during our own generation, Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Bright have been complementary forces. The former has been the great official exponent of Liberal ideas; while Mr. Bright has been the great popular leader, first imbuing the multitude with his own principles, and then expounding them to the Legislature, by which body he has seen them eventually adopted and transformed into law. Probably no other English statesman, looking back upon a political career extending over forty years, was ever able to point to so consistent a course as Mr. Bright has led, or to affirm with equal truth that the cardinal principles of his political creed had been successively accepted and adopted by the various Governments of his time. This much, even his opponents will doubtless admit.

It was meet and fitting that Mr. Bright's signal devotion to the interests of his country should be commemorated by the remarkable series of demonstrations which took place at Birmingham, in June 1883, when the right hon. gentleman had completed his twenty-five years of service as member for the Midland metropolis. The great event of the celebration was the meeting in Bingley Hall, when Mr. Bright was presented with a silver dessert-service, and his portrait by Mr. Holl, R.A., as small tokens of the unbounded confidence and esteem of his constituents. The meeting, which was estimated at 20,000 persons, was of the most enthusiastic description. Mr. George Dixon, the chairman on that occasion, pointed out that the gathering was not a mere miscellaneous one of the people of Birmingham. It was a great representative meeting, containing delegates from a hundred densely populated industrial centres, and a yet larger number of district associations. As one of the daily journals observed : " Mr. Bright's popularity is in no way local, and though his long connection of a quarter of a century with Birmingham gives that town a peculiar right to take the lead in such a celebration as this, there are scores of constituencies which would be only too glad to have the honour. Indeed, we may go further, and say, that it is Mr. Bright's good fortune, and a proof that his countrymen believe in the sterling qualities of the man, even when they least approve of the politician, that not even in the classes upon which he is wont to pour the vials of his scorn is there any other feeling than one of satisfaction at the recognition

accorded to his long public career, unsullied by any stain of meanness or dishonour. Lord Salisbury turned aside on Wednesday from the congenial occupation of exposing the shortcomings of the Government, to pay a tribute to 'the splendid qualities that have adorned Mr. Bright's career, the genius he has displayed, and the fidelity of conviction which, under all circumstances, he has exhibited.' "

But the Bright celebration was something more than this. It was a great Liberal demonstration, and a vindication of Liberal principles. As was pointed out, it came opportunely at a moment when much was dark and uncertain in the immediate political future, and when the minds of men in high places were greatly exercised about impending devolutions of power and authority. Mr. Bright was not merely receiving a splendid compliment, but was also rendering an important service. "The celebration at Birmingham was meant to be the glorification and the apotheosis of the whole conception of politics and life with which Mr. Bright has been upon the whole identified. It was intended to enforce the lesson that as great changes were necessary in the past, and were brought about by Mr. Bright and his friends fighting and overcoming the obstruction of ignorance and prejudice, so are changes not less great required in the present, and are to be attained only by following the lead of those who thus emphatically proclaim their belief in Mr. Bright's principles." So that in this sense the demonstrations possessed a national as well as a personal significance.

Mr. Chamberlain, M.P., who spoke at the great meeting which we have described, drew a comparison between the vast out-door demonstration at Birmingham—the welcome to Mr. Bright—and the Russian Coronation. The former, he observed, lacked nearly all the elements which constituted the great pageant of the latter. Pomp and circumstance were wanting ; no public money was expended ; and no military display accompanied Mr. Bright. The right hon. gentleman continued : “ The brilliant uniforms, the crowds of high officials, the representatives of Royalty were absent, and nobody missed them, for yours was essentially a demonstration of the people and by the people in honour of the man whom the people delighted to honour, and the hero of that demonstration had no offices to bestow—no ribands, or rank, or Court titles to confer. He was only the plain citizen—one of ourselves, commended to you by his transparent honesty and singlemindedness, and by the devotion of a life to the service of the people from whom he sprung. Such a tribute so offered seems to me to be no slight compensation for the exacting toil of public life. And it will be a great encouragement to all who may be tempted, in however less a degree, to follow in his steps, to enter upon a service which is largely and generously acknowledged just in proportion as it is freely and unselfishly rendered. But Mr. Bright has another ground for satisfaction, another compensation for the sacrifice which he has made. He has lived to witness a larger measure of success than has attended the efforts of any other statesman.”

Little more than fifty years ago it might have been said of the English constitution that it had remained practically unchanged since the Revolution. But since that time vast reforms have been effected, and great masses of the people have been admitted to a share in the government of the country. During the progress of these reforms, the Throne, the Church, the House of Lords, the distribution of wealth, have all been declared to be in danger, but as yet all have survived. "Wise men have shown us how to reconstruct ourselves from the foundation, according to the principles of pure reason, but the country has absorbed them all in its manifold and abounding life, and has gone on in the steady course of an evolution determined by laws which no legislator can tamper with." But there are still other reforms to be achieved, which it may fall to Mr. Bright's successors to effect.

With regard to the personal relations of Mr. Bright with his constituents—relations almost unexampled in their close friendliness and mutual esteem—it has been well said :—"There has never been any real strain in the relations of Mr. Bright and his constituents. Never even a pressing difference, and on the various occasions, eight in number, on which he has presented himself for re-election, he has been returned either unopposed or by sweeping and unequivocal majorities. This fidelity of Birmingham to Mr. Bright is the more noteworthy, because while the constituency has undergone great changes since his first election, and in number alone has been multiplied nearly tenfold by the concession of house-

hold suffrage, Mr. Bright's principles and main lines of policy have remained the same. It may be questioned, indeed, if any politician of note has been more thoroughly consistent throughout his career than Mr. Bright. He has never swerved from the principles or disavowed the convictions with which he entered public life nearly fifty years ago. Then, as now, the foundation of his political faith was confidence in the people; then, as now, he placed the happiness of the many before the interests of the few; then, as now, he tested every course of policy by the principles of justice, freedom, and peace. His own motto, 'Be just, and fear not,' is one up to which he has consistently acted throughout his long career, and the watchwords of his youth, it has been aptly remarked, have been the watchwords of his age."

The Birmingham celebration must unquestionably have convinced Mr. Bright that the great mass of his fellow-countrymen regard his public career with even more unmixed pride and satisfaction than he himself has ever indulged in his review of it. Nothing does more to foster and develop the growth of popular convictions than these well-earned popular triumphs. They indelibly imprint on the minds of the democracy of the future the type of statesman which it should set before it and try to raise into an ideal. The *Spectator*, which is generally regarded as the organ of intellectual Liberalism, remarked:—"A part of Mr. Bright's popularity has, undoubtedly, been due to a kind of moderation. Mr. Bright has always been moderate, when his opponents were disposed to meet him



half-way, just as he is moderate now, deprecating almost the proposal to insist at once on equal electoral districts, and arguing only for a very large and substantial redistribution of seats, which shall readjust political power mainly in proportion to population. But the moderation which has made Mr. Bright so popular has been moderation towards those who were coming half-way to meet him, not moderation towards those who met all his proposals with obstinate negatives. To these, he has never been specially moderate. He has gained a great deal of his popularity by pouring the vials of his indignation on the enemies of the popular cause, by denouncing them from time to time in no unmeasured language of scorn and invective. Moderation towards friends, inexorable wrath towards foes—that has been one of the secrets of the immense popularity which Mr. Bright enjoys.” And the *Saturday Review*, which has always been in antagonism to Mr. Bright, observed:—“The Birmingham festival in honour of Mr. Bright could not fail to be successful. It is natural that his political associates and followers should do honour to a chief representative of the principles which some of them hold and all of them profess. It is less easy to understand why moderate Liberals and professed Conservatives should echo without qualification or protest the boastful declarations of their irreconcilable adversaries. It is true that Mr. Bright must be recognised as a great orator irrespectively of the opinions which he has eloquently expounded. He is also manly, consistent, and wholly

exempt from any suspicion of corruption or meanness." The *Times*, also following almost upon the same lines, said:—"The pleasantest feature of this commemoration of Mr. Bright's services to Birmingham and to Great Britain is, that before the haze and glare of thanksgiving settle down on hero and worshippers a real man is visible and real services. There is enough solidity about Mr. Bright and his career to survive, and thereby to excuse, the loudest blowing of trumpets and the most rhetorical panegyrics. Mr. Bright has blended himself so absolutely with national life that it will always be impossible to write or read British history without taking note of his personality. Since 1843 he has been part and parcel of British politics. Other statesmen have spent their years in public administration. His especial characteristic is that he has directed affairs from without as vigorously as his most powerful contemporaries from within. His function has been to reflect particular currents of public feeling as to the lines along which the State should be guided. In one vast positive reform he was a master spirit. In a hundred negative aspects of criticism he has tempered or modified the policy of the country in the hands of rivals or adversaries. His countrymen have recognised the worth of his aid in the development of freedom and the promotion of enlightenment."

Such is the man, then, whom we have endeavoured to depict in the following pages, and for the first time an authentic biography of Mr. Bright is presented to the public. We shall trace his early career by the aid of

special information, giving details of his first attempts at oratory; while the reader will also find a full account of the great movement which developed and demonstrated Mr. Bright's powers. It was under the auspices of his friend Mr. Cobden that he first made a distinguished mark as an orator, and his remarkable speeches on Free Trade are dealt with fully and copiously in the ensuing work. It is true of the greatest speaker that ever lived, that after the lapse of a certain period many of his orations must cease to have that special bearing they had upon his age and his contemporaries; but in Mr. Bright's speeches there are numberless passages which must exercise a profound influence upon the minds of men to the latest generations. All these we have endeavoured to preserve in the course of the following narrative, which is brought down to the present date.

We will conclude this introduction with a fervent hope that this true friend and representative of the people may live for yet many years, in the honour and gratitude of those for whom he has so long laboured.





*J. G. Thompson sculp.*

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE WILLIAM E. GLADSTONE, M.P.

Printed by C. G. Robertson, Edinburgh.







# LIFE

OF THE

## RIGHT HON. JOHN BRIGHT, M.P.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### *BIRTH, YOUTH, AND EDUCATION.*

Introduction.—The Brights a Wiltshire Family.—Migration Northwards.—Mr. Bright's Father.—In Business at Rochdale.—His Family.—Childhood of John Bright.—Early Education.—Favourite Pursuits.—Interest in Political Questions.—His Ancestor, John Gratton.—A Remarkable Character.—Mr. Bright's Earliest Efforts at Speech-making.—Anecdotes.—The Reform Agitation of 1831-32.



MANCASHIRE enjoys the distinction of having given birth to four of the most eminent English statesmen of the nineteenth century. Early in the year 1788, there was born at Chamber Hall, near Bury, the future repealer of the Corn Laws, and of the disabling statutes against the Roman Catholics, Robert Peel; in 1799, Edward Geoffrey Stanley, afterwards Earl of Derby, first saw the light at Knowsley; ten years later, William Ewart Gladstone was born at Liverpool; and finally, on the 16th of November 1811, John Bright was born at Greenbank, then near and now within the town of Rochdale. From north to south, and from east to west, the county which claims these distinguished men has long been conspicuous for its political energy and activity. Manchester, Oldham, Bolton, Rochdale, and other towns, have been especially famous for their zeal since the days of the Reform Bill of 1832.



Manchester, indeed, has furnished the title for a school of politicians of whom the subject of our biography is the most celebrated living representative. Once member for that city, his relations with it have always been of a cordial and intimate character. A momentary estrangement, however, led to a severance of his legislative connection with Manchester, and now for almost a quarter of a century Mr. Bright has been member for Birmingham, which, as the capital of the Midlands, has become as great a centre of political influence and enthusiasm as its manufacturing rival in the north.

The Bright family originally came from Wiltshire, where, in the year 1684, we find that they were occupying a farm some two miles from the picturesque village of Lyneham. The original house no longer exists, but it is stated that the farm-house now standing still bears the name of 'Bright's Farm.' Early in the eighteenth century, one Abraham Bright married Martha Jacobs—supposed, from her name, though with no actual proof of the fact, to be a Jewess—and he and his family migrated to Coventry, in Warwickshire. The grandson of Abraham and Martha Bright was a certain Jacob Bright, the grandfather of the statesman. Jacob Bright married Martha Lucas, by whom he had eight children. The youngest of these was named Jacob. He was born at Coventry in the year 1775. All the Brights were members of the Society of Friends, and it may be mentioned as an interesting fact that the registers of the Society were so accurately kept for upwards of two hundred years, that, upon the passing of the existing law affecting registration, these registers were accepted as legal documents, and acted upon.

Mr. Bright's father was educated at Ackworth School, near Pontefract, soon after its establishment; and from school he went to New Mills, in Derbyshire, to serve an apprenticeship with William Holme, who farmed a little land, and had some looms for the manufacture of fustians. In the year 1802, two of his master's sons removed to Rochdale, where they built a cotton-mill—then and now called Hanging Road Mill,—Mr. Bright also settling in Rochdale, and being employed in connection with the same mill.

Some time after this, Mr. Bright married one of the daughters of his master, and continued up to the year 1809 engaged in the

business of his brothers-in-law. He attended the Manchester market regularly, and his attention to business gained him the good opinion of a firm of agents, who proposed to him to join them in the trade of cotton-spinning, they offering to find the capital, if he would undertake the management of the concern. To this he consented, as there was no certainty that his brothers-in-law and their partners would be willing to accept another partner in their business. He took a lease of a mill, then standing empty, at the edge of Cronkeyshaw Common, less than a mile from the centre of the town of Rochdale. Here he prospered, and was able in 1816, at the end of seven years, to conduct the business with his own capital; but in consideration of the kindness of the partners who had enabled him to begin business, he consented to prolong the partnership for another term of seven years, at the expiration of which, that is, in the year 1823, he took the concern into his own hands. 'From 1809 to 1867,' observed Jacob Bright's son on one occasion, 'is at least fifty-seven years, and I venture to say that with one single exception, and that not of long duration, there has been through that fifty-seven years an uninterrupted harmony and confidence between my family connected with the business and those who have assisted us and been employed in it.' Surely not an empty boast, considering the disturbed periods through which both English labour and capital have passed during that time.

Jacob Bright was thrice married. By his first and third wives he had no issue. His second wife, by whom he had a numerous family, was Miss Martha Wood, daughter of a tradesman of Bolton-le-Moors. They were married on the 21st of July 1809, and had no fewer than eleven children, seven sons and four daughters. Of these, John Bright was the second, and he was born on the date already mentioned. By the death of the first-born at the age of four years, however, he became the eldest in the family. Mrs. Bright was a woman of remarkable qualities. She, also, had been educated at Ackworth School: she was fond of reading and of poetry, and her mind was singularly clear and logical. Unhappily, she was not long spared to be the helpmeet and companion of her husband, for she died on the 18th of June 1830, leaving ten

children, the eldest of whom was, as we have just stated, the subject of this memoir, he being then only eighteen years of age. Of Jacob Bright's children only five now survive, namely, three sons and two daughters. These are Mr. John Bright, Mr. Thomas Bright, and Mr. Jacob Bright, M.P.; Mrs. M'Laren, wife of Mr. Duncan M'Laren, late M.P. for Edinburgh, and Mrs. Lucas, widow of Mr. S. Lucas. Mrs. Lucas is well known for her earnest efforts in the Temperance cause, and for her support of all movements for the social amelioration of women. Miss Esther Bright, who was married in 1849 to Mr. Vaughan, now one of the magistrates at Bow Street, London, died in 1850; Miss Sophia Bright, who was married to Mr. Thomas Ashworth, died in 1844; Mr. Benjamin Bright died at Graefenberg in 1845, at the early age of twenty-eight; Mr. Gratton Bright died at Bologna in 1853, at the age of thirty; and Mr. Samuel Bright died at Geneva in the year 1873. The remains of the last-named were conveyed to England, and they lie buried in the cemetery at Rochdale. Mr. Jacob Bright was liberal and humane towards his workpeople, and bore with all who knew him the character of a strictly just and upright man. After an exemplary life, during which he brought up his large family in habits of virtue and temperance, inculcating also at all times the principles of the Christian religion, Mr. Bright died on the 7th of July 1851, at the age of seventy-six. He was buried in the Friends' graveyard in Rochdale.

With such parents—watchful guardians exercising constantly over him the most direct influence—it is not surprising that John Bright should early have given evidence of being cast in the same mould. Severely conscientious and just, there was yet in him from the first a vein of tenderness which could melt him to tears at any story of human suffering or wrong. His sympathies have ever been lofty and wide, and in their admiration of the luminous intellect, men have sometimes lost sight of the noble heart which prompted the highest and most eloquent efforts of that intellect. Probably no man of commanding power has yet passed through the world and altogether escaped being the victim of misrepresentation. Mr. Bright has been no exception to the rule; but in public matters the

strength of his convictions is more than sufficient to sustain him, while as regards the obloquy which has now and again been cast upon his name by the ignorantly informed, those who best know him best know also its utter groundlessness. We have said thus much upon this point, conscious that as regards some questions of public policy we may feel called upon, with others—but likewise with that deference due to a name so justly esteemed—to dissent from his conclusions.

As a child, Mr. Bright was exceedingly delicate, but with care he was brought through the critical stage of youth, and in time developed into a handsome and intelligent boy. Though apparently robust, however, he was never so strong as he appeared. Quite early he was sent as a day-scholar to the boarding-school of Mr. William Littlewood, of Townhead, Rochdale. His abilities were far above the average, but we do not hear much of precocity—a thing by no means to be regarded as unpromising, seeing that many precocious youths have entirely failed in after-life, while some who as children were regarded as their intellectual inferiors have attained world-wide distinction. Mr. Bright's devotion to the piscatorial art is matter of universal knowledge; and it would surely have delighted the heart of old Izaak Walton, could he have revisited the earth, to find so ardent a follower of the 'gentle craft' as John Bright was before he attained the age of twelve. It is pleasant, notwithstanding, to find that study was not neglected. Mr. Littlewood was satisfied with the progress of his pupil, and that pupil has on more than one occasion since spoken of his first master with great respect and affection. In the year 1822 Mr. Bright was sent to the Friends' School at Ackworth, near Pontefract, where he remained for a year. The next two years were spent in a school at York, conducted by Mr. William Simpson. The site of this school is the first house out of Walmgate Bar, on the left. The air of York not being favourable to his health, he was removed to a school at Newton, six miles from Clitheroe, where he passed a year and a half very pleasantly. The studies here were neither difficult nor protracted, and there was much opportunity for healthy amusement. Mr. Bright, who was especially fond of outdoor pursuits and pleasures, was greatly pleased

with the beautiful scenery which abounds in the neighbourhood of Clitheroe. The river Hodder, a tributary of the Ribble, afforded excellent fishing, with bathing and swimming in the summer ; while the young student was not long in discovering every point and nook of interest in the surrounding hills and woods. Long walks, broken by birds'-nesting, were matters of frequent occurrence ; and he found in the whole of this lovely district a perennial spring of amusement and enjoyment.

On the 16th of February 1827—that is, when Mr. Bright was but three months over fifteen years of age—he left school for good, to engage now in the serious occupations of life. He came home, and at once began to attend to business, helping in the warehouse, walking through the mill, and making himself acquainted with the machinery and the different processes carried on at the works. Mr. Jacob Bright took a practical view of things, and did not regard as essential a classical training for his sons. Had such a training been given to Mr. Bright, he would undoubtedly have gained in some respects, but the world might have lost that wonderful freshness which distinguishes all his orations. As may be gathered from the character of his speeches, however, Mr. Bright was at a very early period a student of the best English poets—in whom he is well grounded—and of the course of British history. He also took a keen interest in the various public questions of the time.

But although he had previously been stirred by such subjects as Catholic Emancipation, it was really in the year 1830 that his strongest concern in practical politics began. In that year a very exciting election occurred at Preston. The late Lord Derby, then Mr. Stanley, was opposed by Henry Hunt, or 'Radical Hunt,' or 'Orator Hunt,' as he was variously styled. It appears that in Messrs. Brights' warehouse there was one Nicholas Nuttall, a very intelligent man ; and Nicholas, as he was always called, evinced the utmost enthusiasm in the Preston contest, which, as the manner of elections then was, lasted many days. There were no railways and no telegraphs, but each morning the state of the poll at Preston was made known in Rochdale. Nicholas discussed the progress of the election from day to day, and when the contest

ended in favour of the popular candidate, Mr. Hunt, his delight was unbounded.

Much of this enthusiasm was of course imparted to Mr. Bright, and politics now became in some degree a study with him. Mr. Bright is a Liberal both of necessity and from reason. His father was Liberal, and the religious Society in which he was brought up was composed of Liberals. He had heard and read much of the history of the Friends, and of the persecutions they had endured, and also of their principles of equality and justice. He knew that he came of the stock of the martyrs—that one of his ancestors, John Gratton, of Monyash, in Derbyshire, had been in prison for several years because he preferred to worship in the humble meeting-house of his own sect, rather than in the church of the law-favoured portion of the community, by whom the Friends were barbarously persecuted. This John Gratton, whose granddaughter was Mr. Jacob Bright's grandmother, was a remarkable man. He was a Quaker preacher of great power and indomitable energy, who travelled through many of the English counties, his religious fervour and eloquence exercising especially an extraordinary influence for good in Cheshire and Derbyshire. He also visited Scotland and Ireland. Arrested several times, and subjected to the statutory fine of £20, he never abated his zeal. In his own journal he says: 'I was a prisoner for the Gospel's sake about five years and a half, before I was set at liberty by King James the Second. As also many hundreds more were, I was discharged in open court, the 23rd of the first month, 1686.' John Gratton died in the month of September 1711; and in the biographical literature of the Society of which he was a most conspicuous member will be found the record of his life. In the county in which he lived he was a person of much influence, and in a Parliamentary return which Mr. Bright moved for many years ago, it is recorded that when Nonconformist places of worship were legalised by the Toleration Act, all the meeting-houses of Friends in Derbyshire were registered by and in the name of John Gratton.

Something of this man's spirit was communicated to his descendants, and in the inflexible and upright character of John

Bright we perceive a by no means faint reminiscence of John Gratton. Much of the same character, indeed, runs through all his family; and there is scarcely one of his brothers and sisters who has not either devoted himself or herself to the elevation of the people, either within the quiet sphere of personal influence or upon the platform.

Interest naturally attaches to Mr. Bright's earliest efforts at public speaking; and his first speech of note of which any record exists, was one made in connection with a series of lectures delivered by Mr. J. Silk Buckingham at Rochdale on Egypt, Palestine, Mesopotamia, and India. Mr. Buckingham, who will doubtless be widely remembered as the founder of the *Athenæum*, was a highly cultured man, and an admirable and effective lecturer. Mr. Bright, from his remarks made at the close of the series of addresses, seems to have been much impressed by the vivid pictures drawn by Mr. Buckingham. He rose to propose a vote of thanks to the lecturer, and we are fortunately able to give the brief speech he delivered on this occasion. After an introductory sentence, he said: 'Under the able guidance of an experienced traveller we have visited the classical land of Egypt; the wonders of her splendid cities have been described, the tombs of her Pharaohs and of their subjects have been explored. We have even ascended the giant pyramid, and from its summit have surveyed in imagination the splendid prospect so beautifully, so poetically described to us—the glorious sun rising in the east proclaiming the approach of day, the silvery moon sinking in the pathless waste of sand, and as if unable or unwilling to compare with his superior brilliancy. We have traversed the barren sands of Arabia, and have, as it were, feasted our eyes upon the beauties of the oases of the desert;—we have admired the nobleness of soul which so eminently characterises the wandering tribes, and have paid our tribute of respect to that spirit of independence whose fire burns as brightly in their breasts now as in ages long gone by;—we have heard with feelings of solemnity and of unspeakable interest the animated description of the present condition of Palestine:—we have viewed with astonishment the lofty cedar of Lebanon—the witness of a thousand years, and the unvarying fertility of Mount

Hermon;—we have trod the calm and peaceful retreats of the Mount of Olives, and have perambulated the streets of Jerusalem, the most renowned city on the face of the earth; and as we gazed on Calvary, the recollection of the momentous transactions with which it will ever be associated awakened in us feelings which it would be vain for me to attempt to describe. From the summit of a neighbouring hill we have beheld Damascus in all its beauty, its fertile plain, its lucid streams, its glittering minarets, its lofty domes—almost realising to the fancy the existence of a Paradise upon earth. Again, we have wandered at leisure along the banks of those majestic, those magnificent rivers the Tigris and the Euphrates, and have felt sad at beholding the complete desolation of Nineveh and Babylon. We have journeyed on to Bagdad, a city whose very name is synonymous with splendour; we have admired the vastness and simplicity of its mosques, the beauty of its caravanserais, the grandeur of its baths, the extent of its bazaars—and I doubt not we have received impressions in some degree favourable with regard to the manners and customs of Eastern life. This evening we have penetrated into that grand country situate between the Indus and the Ganges, that land which our imagination has pictured as ever teeming with wealth—

“Where from fountains ever flowing,  
Indian realms their treasures pour.”

We have seen how that wealth may be rendered available to England, and how the blessings of civilisation and Christianity may be spread abroad in that vast empire. We have also had a clear view of that which to this country is of great importance, viz., the immense field which there exists for the extension of British commerce, and for the consumption of British manufactures.’

In response to the call of Mr. Bright, Mr. Buckingham was warmly thanked for his instructive lectures—lectures, perhaps, the more generally appreciated, because at that time the means for obtaining information on such subjects, within the reach of the working classes, were very limited. It is interesting to note that the above early and hitherto unpublished observations by Mr.



Bright show that even soon after he had passed his twenty-first year his attention was drawn to the great commercial value of India.

The sympathies of Mr. Bright were in his youth enlisted in the cause of Temperance, and his first appearance in public in connection with the movement, which was then creating considerable interest in Lancashire and Yorkshire, was at a temperance meeting held in the schoolroom at Catley Lane Head, near Rochdale. Amongst his other early addresses, was one delivered at a meeting of the Bible Society, held in the Friends' Meeting-house at Rochdale. The Rev. John Aldis, a Baptist minister of eminence—whose sons have of recent years won distinguished and unparalleled honours at Cambridge—has described his meeting with Mr. Bright on this occasion. In 1832 Mr. Aldis was stationed at Manchester, but he attended the Rochdale meeting above mentioned, and subsequently gave the following interesting reminiscence of Mr. Bright's appearance. Mr. Aldis was at a friend's house when John Bright arrived to accompany him to the meeting: 'Soon a slender, modest young gentleman came, who surprised me by his intelligence and thoughtfulness. I took his arm on the way to the meeting, and I thought he seemed nervous. I think it was his first public speech, at all events in such connection. It was very eloquent and powerful, and carried away the meeting, but it was elaborate and *memoriter*. On our way back, as I congratulated him, he said that such efforts cost him too dear, and asked me how I spoke so easily. I then took the full advantage of my seniority to set forth my notions, which I need not repeat here, except this—that in his case, as in most, I thought it would be best not to burden the memory too much; but having carefully prepared and committed any portions when special effect was desired, merely to put down other things in the desired order, leaving the wording of them to the moment. Years rolled away. I had entirely forgotten the name of the young Friend, when the Free Trade Bazaar was held in London. One of those engaged for it—Mr. Baker, of Stockport—calling on me, asked if I had called on Mr. Bright. I said I had not been able to attend the meetings, and did not personally know him at all. He replied, "You must, for I heard him say that you gave him his first lesson in public speaking." I

went to a subsequent meeting, and recognised the young Friend of 1832.' While Mr. Bright was energetic at this time as regards a variety of objects, he did not forget that healthful recreation which does so much for the life of the body. In addition to other pursuits, he was an active member of the Rochdale Cricket Club, until the year 1833, playing in its various matches, and playing well. In the record of total individual scores for the year 1833, his name appears fourth on the list.

The Reform agitation was at its height in the year 1831. The town of Rochdale had not been included in the original schedule of the Reform Bill amongst the towns which it was proposed to enfranchise, and this fact caused great disappointment in the town and district. Vigorous steps were at once taken, and meetings held upon the question. Mr. Bright was present as a listener at one of these meetings. Ultimately the movement was successful, and the name of the town of Rochdale was inserted in the favoured list. The debates in Parliament during the ensuing session created the most profound feeling throughout the whole of Lancashire. When the bill passed, reformers hailed with delight the greatly enlarged constituency.

Towards the close of this memorable year in the history of the Reform question, Mr. Bright attained his majority. As yet he was engaged in expanding his mind by reading and observation, and in garnering the rich fruits of experience. Though unconsciously laying the groundwork of future distinction, he had not hitherto given striking evidence of the possession of those powers which were destined to place him in the very first rank of British orators.

## CHAPTER II.

*EARLY SPEECHES, ADDRESSES, ETC.*

Mr. Bright first Visits the Continent.—The Rochdale Literary and Philosophical Society.—Mr. Bright on Capital Punishment.—On Various Questions of Interest.—Tour in the East.—Address on Church Establishments.—Education.—Mr. Bright's first Meeting with Cobden.—Factory Labour.—The Corn Laws.—Address to the Reformers of Rochdale.—Church Rates.—An Exciting Contest.—Animated Speech by Mr. Bright.—His Efforts as a Writer.—First Marriage.



IN the year 1833 Mr. Bright went abroad for the first time. His delight in foreign travel was very great, although he has not, as he himself has said, done what he could have wished in this direction, in consequence of the pressure of business and public engagements. His first Continental experiences were brief. From London he passed over to Ostend, visiting Ghent, Brussels, Antwerp, Cologne, Frankfort, and Mayence. He voyaged down the Rhine to Rotterdam, but finding the cholera severely prevalent in that city, returned to England. On arriving at Rochdale, he occupied himself as usual with business, attending the Manchester market with the utmost regularity, and earning considerable reputation for his business habits.

Mr. Bright took a prominent part this year in the formation of a society called the Rochdale Literary and Philosophical Society. Politics and religion were excluded from its discussions, but in other respects the society—as such societies will—boxed the entire compass of social, philosophical, and practical questions. There is one subject on which Mr. Bright has always felt strongly, and upon which he has recently spoken with much force, viz., the abolition of capital punishment. It will therefore not be without interest that we shall give some unreported notes of a speech he made in his

twenty-second year upon this question, and in connection with the above-named society.

He began by observing that he was not disposed to argue the question as to the propriety of the punishment of death on religious grounds, nor did he intend to quote largely from Scripture in support of his views. They should study this question with a just estimate of its importance, and unbiassed by the prejudices which formed an almost passless barrier. It was urged that there was a declaration in the Bible to the effect that 'whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed,' yet David committed a pre-meditated murder, and he was not destroyed. 'Here then it is proved that death need not of necessity follow the commission of murder, and there are probably other modes of punishment which are of equal or greater efficacy.' As regarded the New Testament, there was amply sufficient in that to convince the real inquirer after truth, that any extreme of cruelty in punishment beyond what could be proved to be really necessary and indispensable, was contrary to the spirit of Christianity. The question then resolved itself into one of utility, and if it could be shown that the punishment of death was useless and unnecessary, humanity would have gained a triumph. Mr. Bright then went on to maintain that the end of *all* punishment should be the correction of the criminal with a view to reclaim him, and the holding out of an example which might serve to deter others from the like evil actions. Now correction with a view to amendment was certainly unattainable by death, and thus one-half of the end to be gained by punishment was entirely defeated. The intention of example, too, was no better answered, when we found that year after year desperate robberies and murders were committed as frequently as ever, and that criminals treated the idea of death with levity and scorn. Every possible expedient should be had recourse to before taking human life. With regard to the argument that the 'death' punishment placed it out of the power of the individual to commit murder again, he pointed out that upon the same reasoning every insane person might be put to death, because the public were never entirely secure from the consequences of insanity. If we could avoid the mad actions of

these men, could we not as easily place the criminal in such circumstances that he should never more have power to inflict injury? But there was another very strong argument against the punishment of death, viz., that if the sufferer were guiltless the injury was irremediable, the wrong irreparable. Many cases had occurred where innocent men had been executed. What reparation could be made here? The consequences were fearful if the sufferer were innocent. Such a punishment could not be in accordance with the spirit of our nature, or with the principles of the Christian religion. It was abhorrent alike to sound policy, religion, and humanity. As a proof that the punishment was repugnant to us, he cited the estimation in which the character of a public executioner was held. Why should we place him almost without the pale of civilised life, while 'the warrior is dressed in a manner calculated to charm the unthinking? His proud and haughty bearing imposes upon the ignorant, his glittering steel and trappings strike the fancy, the stirring strains of martial music divert the thought from his real occupation, and we look with complacency—nay, with approbation—upon a profession, if not instituted for, yet generally employed for, the sole purpose of ravaging the earth, murdering mankind, of aggrandising the few at the expense of the many, and of destroying the roots of the blessed tree of liberty wherever they may have a tendency to flourish.'

This passage foreshadows a little Mr. Bright's declamation in later years. The speaker proceeded to remark that custom was no proof that a thing was right. But if we abolished capital punishments, what was proposed as a substitute? The ferocious robber and the murderer must not again be let loose upon society. There was a punishment that would answer both the ends of correction and reclamation, viz., solitary confinement, with or without labour as circumstances might require. It was generally acknowledged that crime is prevented more by the certainty than the severity of punishment, and here the punishment would be rendered perfectly certain, and regulated by degree. In reply to the objection that solitary confinement is not punishment enough for the crime of murder, Mr. Bright asked, 'Does any one know what solitary confinement is?

When the guilty mind is left without anything to distract attention from itself, it cannot remain inactive ; it must think, and the remorse which accompanies its misdeeds will prey upon it with tenfold fury ; conscience, perhaps long dormant, will reassert its sway, and the pangs of self-condemnation will be immeasurably increased ; nay, if all the wretchedness of a few years of solitary confinement could be concentrated into a few moments, would it not surpass all the pain which can possibly be felt from dissolution ? Upon the horrors of solitude when the guilty soul can prey upon nothing but itself, I can adduce the testimony of one who, I doubt not, at times felt deep remorse for his misdeeds. I allude to Lord Byron, who says—

“ There is no power in holy men,  
Nor charm in prayer, nor purifying form  
Of penitence, nor outward look, nor fast,  
Nor agony, nor, greater than all these,  
The innate tortures of that deep despair  
Which is remorse without the fear of hell,  
But all in all sufficient to itself  
To make a hell of Heav’n—can exorcise  
From out the unbounded spirit, the quick sense  
Of its own sins, wrongs, sufferance, and revenge  
Upon itself : there is no future pang  
Can deal that justice on the self-condemn’d,  
He deals on his own soul.”

Men who had committed terrible crimes had delivered themselves up to justice because they could bear no longer their load of misery. They preferred the momentary horrors of a public execution rather than be doomed to drag out a wretched existence. He firmly believed that the punishment he had alluded to would, in many cases, be much more dreaded than death itself, and that incarceration would have a far more powerful and enduring effect upon the public than any which could be produced by the frequency of public executions. ‘ When we consider,’ urged Mr. Bright, in conclusion, ‘ that the effect of public executions is to deaden the feelings of kindness and mercy implanted by nature in the breast, to blunt all the finer sensibilities of the heart, and to substitute barbarism and vindictiveness in the place of civilisation and Christian forbearance—when we consider

the awful consequences to the wicked, degraded, and miserable sufferer, allowed no time for repentance, distracted by the thoughts of his approaching fate, hurried from time into eternity by the hand of a being owing his existence to the same Creator as himself—shall we not conclude that man, a being weak in purpose and feeble in action, whose limited comprehension and contracted views are daily evident to our senses, by taking away the life of man employs a power which has not been delegated to him, and usurps an authority which belongs only to our Sovereign Judge? I appeal to you as to men whose minds are unfettered by the trammels of prejudice, and as being disposed to have other and better motives for your actions than the mere sanction of custom, I appeal to you on behalf of humanity and religion, and feel confident that the justice of the cause will ensure your zealous support.'

Such was Mr. Bright's first utterance upon the question of capital punishment. Other interesting topics were discussed by the Rochdale Literary and Philosophical Society. For example, on one occasion Mr. Bright raised the question, 'From our study of history, ancient and modern, what form of government appears the best suited to promote the happiness of mankind?' Ultimately the mover submitted a resolution, 'That a limited monarchy is best suited for this country at the present time;' and this motion was carried by eighteen votes to four. At another meeting, Mr. Bright discussed the point whether Alfred or Alexander was more justly entitled to the epithet of 'the Great.' He summed up strongly in favour of the English monarch, and the meeting unanimously endorsed his views. On the question whether defensive war was justifiable on scriptural grounds, Mr. Bright moved an amendment to the effect that it was not justifiable; and this was carried by a majority of six, thus showing that the society had a considerable number of peaceably disposed citizens in its midst. Mr. Bright supported a motion declaring that in the opinion of the meeting the universal education of the people was necessary, which also was unanimously agreed to. Another motion was passed on the initiative of Mr. Bright, to the effect 'That the moral tendency of public amusements, such as the theatre, circus, &c., is injurious.' The

society was rather puzzled by the 'science' of phrenology, which was just then beginning to attract great attention, and exactly even numbers were recorded for and against it. During the session of 1836 Mr. Bright gave a lecture upon the decline and fall of nations, concluding with a motion, 'That there are causes to which the decline of nations may be attributed without having recourse to the argument that "nations are subject to the same laws as individuals," &c.' This rather vaguely-expressed resolution secured general opinion in its favour. A member having brought forward for discussion the question, 'Was Mary, Queen of Scots, accessory to the death of her husband, Lord Darnley?' a long and warm debate ensued. Mr. Bright, whose historical studies were amongst his most favoured intellectual pursuits, gave evidence of a close acquaintance with the subject, and expressed his fear that Mary was not entirely blameless in the matter. But that unfortunate and misguided Queen was saved from utter condemnation at the hands of the Rochdale debaters by the passing of a resolution to the effect, that the contradictory nature of the evidence adduced by historians of the sixteenth century made it impossible to convict or acquit Mary of being accessory to the murder. In June, 1838, Mr. Bright read an essay on the 'Success of Steam Navigation between this Country and America, and the spread of Civilisation and Knowledge consequent thereon.' Later in the same year he headed a committee formed for the purpose of making a collection for an exhibition, when a number of very entertaining and valuable objects appear to have been secured. Mr. Bright was really one of the chief moving spirits of this society, which, in the general literary ability of its members, and its lists of eminent men as lecturers, &c., ranked above the average of such debating institutions.

In the summer of 1836 Mr. Bright again went abroad, his journeyings on this occasion being more extensive and protracted. He sailed in the *Crescent* steamer from Liverpool, bound for Smyrna and Constantinople, visiting Lisbon, Gibraltar, Malta, Syra, the Piræus, Athens, and Marathon. A fortnight which he spent at Smyrna with an English merchant, Mr. H. R. Barker, was a time of great enjoyment. On arriving at Constantinople, he found the



plague present in that city, and was not admitted into the houses of the Europeans. Mr. Bright subsequently visited Beyrout, Jaffa, Jerusalem (with the adjacent points of world-wide interest), and Alexandria. He was struck by the wretchedness of the people at the last-named place. From Egypt he again went to Athens, where he remained for six weeks, being unable to get away, as there were no vessels for Malta. While at Athens, Mr. Bright was attacked by a severe intermittent fever. Upon his recovery he left the Piræus on Christmas Eve for Malta in a Greek brig. The passage occupied eleven days. There was very little wind, and two days were lost, owing to the captain's taking a mistaken course.

On arriving at Malta, the vessel was put in quarantine for fourteen days. Subsequently Mr. Bright went by sailing-boat to Catania, thence to Messina, Palermo, Naples, and Rome. He also visited Florence, Leghorn, and Genoa, and returned to England by way of Marseilles and Paris. Altogether, he was away from England for a period of eight months, of which more than a month was spent in quarantine. This spell of travel was not only of immense interest to Mr. Bright, but he always regarded it as of great physical and intellectual benefit to him. His journey raised only one feeling of regret, viz., that owing to uncontrollable causes it could not be repeated. Upon his return in 1837, the enthusiastic traveller delivered a lecture in his native town on the countries he had visited, interspersing his descriptions with extracts from Lord Byron, a poet whom he at that time greatly affected. Perhaps the most effective passage in this lecture was Mr. Bright's description of Jerusalem, a city which had long exercised a strange fascination over him, as it does upon the minds of all Christians. He was greatly moved by its fallen grandeur, and the literal fulfilment of the old prophecies of which it furnished so striking an example.

A speech delivered by Mr. Bright about this time at a great meeting at Rochdale, but of which no report was published, enables us to get at the right hon. gentleman's early views upon the question of Church establishments. Being called upon to second a resolution, that all civil establishments of religion are directly opposed to the spirit of Christianity, Mr. Bright observed that the creed and form

of worship did not constitute the Establishment, but the preference and union of the civil power. They wished to wage no war with religious opinions ; their object was to show the mischievous tendency of any alliance between Church and State. A principal argument for the continuance of an establishment was, that it provided for the religious instruction of the whole population. But establishments could not compel people to become religious, or to believe in any particular tenets. They could compel, and did compel, payment for benefits which they pretended to dispense, but which were not received. But they could only offer religious instruction, and did not Dissenters do the same? He trusted that the time had gone by when Christianity should be thought to stand in need of such assistance.

Referring to the argument that the downfall of the Establishment would be attended with the downfall of Christianity, which he described as monstrous, Mr. Bright thus raised by anticipation the Irish Church question : ' This assertion carries with it its own refutation ; but if arguments are wanted, if instances and examples are requisite, look for a moment upon America and upon Ireland. In the former country there is no civil establishment ; all are alike equal in the eye of the Government ; all work smoothly together, and without those never-ending heart-burnings and jealousies which exist in this country, and particularly in Ireland. Will any one venture to say that the United States of America are less religious than Ireland—that crime is more common and immorality more prevalent? And yet there religion receives no support from, nor is it in any manner connected with, the State ; whilst in unfortunate Ireland there is a Church established by law, countenanced by the Government, and supported by an army of some twenty-five thousand men, wringing its maintenance from an almost starving population, seven-eighths of whom entirely disagree with it in principles and in doctrine. When he heard of the acts of persecution which took place in Ireland, he could almost blush that he was of a nation whose Government and whose Church, established by law, sanctioned such unholy deeds. But it was in the very nature of all monopolists to persecute those who were unwilling to submit to their dictation. Basil Hall, when

speaking of America, and of monopolies in religion, observed that America was more religious than England, and England was more religious than Italy—the closer the monopoly, the less abundant the supply. The corruption which was so evident in the Church established by law arose mainly, if not solely, from its alliance with the State. To ally a Church with the State was the best and speediest method of impairing its efficiency and destroying its purity. When the Church was dependent upon the State, it naturally supported that system of government which was willing to continue its monopoly. At one time it was *conceded* to the English clergy by the State to preach against the horrors of war if they were not chaplains to regiments or in the navy. The ministry, therefore, by being dependent upon the State, became degraded and corrupt, and more desirous of retaining their incomes than of propagating the truths of religion. A remarkable instance of this was upon record. Out of 9400 beneficed clergymen who acknowledged the Pope as head of the Church, only 177 preferred to resign their livings rather than own the supremacy of Queen Elizabeth. This reminded him of the Vicar of Bray, whose religious convictions were dependent upon the Sovereign for the time being. When reproached for his inconsistency, he answered that he considered himself a very model of consistency, for he had long been determined to live and to die the Vicar of Bray.

Mr. Bright went on to remark that the Establishment was papal, though its present religion was not. The eyes of the people were at length being opened to the crying abuses of the system, and to see that a civil establishment of religion was incompatible with religious liberty—contrary to that freedom of conscience which was the inalienable right of every human being. Toleration was not liberty, and they refused to have only by permission that which belonged to them as a right. History proved that all religions which had been exalted above others, and patronised by the civil power, had shown themselves intolerant in spirit, and persecutors of those who differed from them. The priesthood in all ages had been persecutors—whether Jews, Pagans, Catholics, or Protestants. Seeing, then, these things, and that within the last two hundred

years there were no less than five thousand of the members of his own Society, as well as great numbers of Baptists, in prison for conscience' sake, did it not seem inevitable that a predominant sect should imbibe an intolerant and a persecuting spirit?

'The declaration of the laity of the Church as by law established says, I believe, that the Establishment has been the means of increasing individual piety and national prosperity; but I would ask, How comes it that England is now, as regards a vast proportion of her population, ignorant and irreligious—how is it that whilst the Church has had the king for its head and governor, the two Houses of Parliament to support it, and the whole influence of the aristocracy and landed gentry of the country to boot (with the advantage of being educated at Oxford and Cambridge, from which Dissenters have been shut out)—that whilst the Church has had millions upon millions to work upon, drawn not only from their own party, but from the property of Dissenters—I ask how comes it that England is neither a sober nor a moral country, and that vice in every shape rears its horrid front? Does it not prove that there is a radical error in the system? By the union of the people of England advantages of no trifling amount have lately been gained: the barrier of the Test Acts has been broken down; the citadel of Parliamentary corruption has been stormed with success; and I trust the time is not far distant when the consciences of men will be no longer shackled by the restrictions of the civil power, when religious liberty will take the place of toleration, and when men will wonder that a monopoly ever existed which ordained State priests "sole vendors of the lore that works salvation."

This is, perhaps, the freshest and most forcible of those early addresses by Mr. Bright of which hitherto no record has been preserved.

The subject of our biography has always taken a deep interest in the education question, and it was in connection with this question that his friendship with Mr. Cobden arose. Mr. Bright detailed the circumstances in his address at Bradford, when unveiling the Cobden statue. 'I went over to Manchester,' he said, 'to ask him if he would be kind enough to come to Rochdale, and to speak at an education meeting which was about to be held in the schoolroom of the Baptist chapel in West Street of that town. I found him in his office in Mosley Street. I introduced myself to him. I told him what I wanted. His countenance lit up with pleasure to find that there were others who were working in this question, and he, without hesitation, agreed to come. He came, and he spoke; and although he was then so young as a speaker, yet the qualities of

his speech were such as remained with him so long as he was able to speak at all—clearness, logic, a conversational eloquence, a persuasiveness which, when conjoined with the absolute truth there was in his eye and in his countenance, it was almost impossible to resist.' After the Rochdale meeting, Mr. Cobden spent the night at the house of Mr. Jacob Bright, and from that time forward was established a friendship between the Anti-Corn-Law leader and John Bright, which gathered in intimacy, and lasted, unbroken and undisturbed by a single jar of any kind, during the long period of twenty-five years. The two friends came to be known, in fact, as the Jonathan and David of the League, and the comparison was far from being inapt.

In the year 1836 Mr. Bright stepped into the field of controversy on the question of the factory operatives. Factory legislation is one of those subjects upon which the right hon. gentleman has suffered from misrepresentation. On account of certain views which he held upon factory labour, he has been charged with being the enemy of the poor and overworked operative. Nothing could be further from the fact; nor was he opposed to remedial legislation on behalf of children in factories. The truth is, that the factory reformers, in propounding their schemes of amelioration, proposed to prohibit the labour of adult women as much as the labour of young persons under eighteen years of age; and as mills could not be worked without a certain proportion of female labour, the consequence of such a step would be to limit the labour of men in the same manner and in the same degree. On this point, therefore, of the employment of adult female labour, Mr. Bright supported the view that no compulsion should be used. In the year above mentioned, Mr. John Fielden, M.P. for Oldham, issued a pamphlet entitled *The Curse of the Factory System*. To this pamphlet Mr. Bright put forth a reply, and we have now his observations before us. It was not the author's intention to show that the factory operatives of England could without injury continue to labour for the same number of hours that they had been doing, nor did he attempt to prove that the employers were free from blame in the great question of factory labour. Mr. Fielden, in his pamphlet enlarged upon the cruelties

practised towards factory apprentices, and quoted statements from Sir R. Peel's speech in 1816 to prove the heartlessness of the employers. He also gave extracts from the evidence taken before the Commissioners of 1833, to prove that these enormities still existed, and that the same relentless spirit and love of gain actuated the manufacturers. Granting that a strong case had been made out for legislative interference, Mr. Bright regretted that the cause had been advocated in an unworthy manner, and in a vindictive spirit towards those who had already legislated upon the question. Mr. Bright proved that Mr. Poulett Thomson's proposed bill would not re-enslave 35,867 children, as asserted by Mr. Fielden, and further showed that Ministers had not opposed Lord Ashley's Ten Hours' Bill because it did not afford protection to children, but because it interfered with the labour of adults. The writer then went on to answer Mr. Fielden point by point upon details connected with the management of factories and the system pursued towards the operatives. He (Mr. Bright) applauded that man who endeavoured to rescue the operative from a situation in many respects injurious to the full development of his faculties, and hostile to the amelioration of his moral and physical condition; but this could never be done by a statement in which those whose intentions were equally good with the author's were loaded with obloquy, and in which greatly exaggerated statements were made for the sole end of exciting commiseration.

Mr. Bright then came to Mr. Fielden's remarks, as follows, upon foreign competition: 'If I am told that that which is necessary to be done is, that we should manufacture in England so cheaply that no people engaged in like pursuits can *undersell* us in any market in the world, my answer is, that the customers in those markets will take good care that we do this, and therefore we need have no concern on that score.' He was at a loss to conceive what this meant; and if the writer had failed to convince, he had certainly puzzled his readers. Whilst he was attempting to convince us of the folly of the ideas we had entertained upon foreign competition, he proved beyond doubt that either we must manufacture as cheaply as our rivals, or we must lose our customers in foreign markets. And yet

we were at the same time told that foreign competition was a fallacy, a bugbear! 'The author of *The Curse of the Factory System*, though unconscious of any evil to be suffered from foreign competition, is continually haunted by the belief that we are on the brink of destruction, and that a rapid and appalling decline is taking place as to our foreign trade in our manufacturing pursuits, because we are returning to the Americans a larger quantity of cloth in exchange for the quantity of cotton we receive from them than we were doing a few years ago.' Mr. Bright demonstrated by statistics the fallacy of this argument, and proceeded to remark that, upon the hypothesis of Mr. Fielden, every increase of consumption in this country had only served to accelerate its ruin, by bringing us nearer upon the heels of the cotton grower; and thus at length the very causes to which the world had attributed our unexampled wealth and prosperity had been discovered by the sagacity of the hon. member for Oldham to be those which had all along been hurrying us unconsciously to our ruin. As a sovereign remedy for these imaginary disasters, a reduction of the time of labour to ten hours was prescribed; and this specific was not only to protect the children, but to serve as a regulator to production, and to prevent stocks from increasing in the market. Now, the protection of children was a good ground for demanding a reduction in the hours of labour, but he strongly protested against the principle that trade would be benefited by any interference on the part of the Government as to production, stock, &c. Mr. Fielden had also taken upon himself to defend the landowner; and in sketching the history of the tax upon corn, Mr. Bright remarked that while a poor man with a large family probably consumed more corn than the rich man with a family equally numerous, yet instead of paying less in corn-tax, he must necessarily pay more than the rich man, whilst at the same time the rich man was receiving all the benefit of the monopoly.

The Corn Laws, he maintained, were the principal curse of the operative, and the curse of the factory system had in great measure its origin in the effects of those laws. If the advocates of the Ten Hours' Bill were to demand the abolition of the unholy monopoly in corn at the same time that they called for a reduction in the hours

of labour, they would stand upon firmer ground. The whole country would then take up the cause of the factory operative. The writer fully and entirely agreed with Mr. Fielden and Mr. Greg that a reduction in the hours of labour was most important to the health of the manufacturing population, and absolutely necessary to any general and material amelioration in their moral and intellectual condition; and he envied neither the head nor the heart of that man who could live amongst the factory operatives of Lancashire without perceiving the injurious effects of the long hours and close confinement to which they were subjected, and without feeling an ardent desire to assist in improving their condition.

This is not the language of an opponent of factory reform. Mr. Bright further said that the day had happily gone by when it was necessary to argue whether it was the duty of Government to aid in this work; and he combated the idea that such a course would be an infringement of the liberty of the subject and the legitimate employment of capital, or that it would so far interfere with the principles of Free Trade as to be undesirable and pernicious. He argued these points at length; and with regard to the evidence taken before the Committee of the House of Commons on the treatment of young persons in factories, he thought no reasonable or humane man would refuse his assent to the proposition that a case had been made out which called for the interference of the Legislature. Touching upon the legislation which had come into operation on the 1st of March preceding (1836), he pointed out the causes of its failure. Experience had taught, and every one acquainted with the factory question knew, that the adults in a mill could not work twelve hours while the children only worked ten—one class depending so much upon the other; and that whatever restrictions were imposed upon the one, would be equally binding upon the other. They must therefore fix a time during which both children and adults should work, and which limit should not be exceeded by either. The Act would then be so simple that evasion would be impossible. Millowners themselves were to blame for much of the excitement that had arisen, as they had held themselves aloof from all sound legislation on the subject. Mr. Bright



concluded by suggesting a practical compromise, which should at once show the willingness of the millowners to consult the welfare of the operatives, and at the same time content the operatives themselves, and materially improve their condition. He finally exhorted the millowners to cast aside selfish considerations, and adopt the just and sound maxim, 'That the interests of all classes are so intimately blended, that none can suffer without injury being inflicted upon the rest, and that the true interest of each will be found to be advanced by those measures which conduce to the prosperity of the whole.'

In the above observations we have the first expression of Mr. Bright's views on the Corn Laws. One of his leading points—that the abrogation of these laws would be of inestimable advantage to the working classes—has been strikingly fulfilled. Under the *régime* of Free Trade, the English workman has better wages, better food, and fewer hours of labour. There is, in fact, no act of the legislature to which we could point which has done so much for the comfort and improvement of the working classes as the repeal of the Corn Laws.

In and before the year 1837, the Tories were making strenuous efforts to regain their power in the country. The time was regarded as an anxious one by all reformers, who were most desirous not to lose what they had acquired since 1832. It was, therefore, during a period of considerable political perturbation that Mr. Bright put forth an address, dated January 31st, 1837, 'To the Radical Reformers of the Borough of Rochdale.' The address was anonymous, and we quote from the only copy of it probably which is in existence. It began by pointing out the important juncture which had arrived in political affairs, and the necessity laid upon every man to range himself with one of the two great parties struggling for the mastery. The writer then continued: 'By the Tories the government of this country has been conducted for fifty years at least, previous to 1830; and I presume I need not go at length into their doings to persuade you to unite with me in opinion, that the profligate waste of public money, the shameless system of jobbery and corruption, which has grown up under their rule, has no parallel in the history of any

people pretending to the possession of a representative government. The Tories wish to continue this system; and on every side we behold the extraordinary exertions they are now making to regain possession of the power which has been so lately, and with so much difficulty, wrested from them. Compared with the mass of the nation, their number is inconsiderable; they are, however, formidable from their wealth, and still more so from the untiring activity which they display in the prosecution of their nefarious projects. In the House of Commons they are in a minority, but they count there upwards of three hundred members. In the Lords their principles are omnipotent, and the peers are straining every nerve to regain their ascendancy in the Commons. The majority which the very best measures of the Ministry can command is by no means great, and hence will be seen at once the importance which is now attached to the acquisition of a single vote by either of the contending parties.'

The young and ardent elector then turned to the condition of politics in his native town of Rochdale. Nowhere had Toryism shown itself in more detestable colours than in that borough. The writer thus observed upon their conduct with respect to the Church-rate question: 'You will recollect, no doubt, that when they found themselves unable to obtain a rate from the assembled parishioners, they proceeded to levy one for which they had no authority; that by dint of coaxing some and bullying others they succeeded in obtaining some payments; that they seized the goods of those who would not submit to church-warden law, and attempted to sell them by auction, but found no purchasers, except amongst the wretched hangers-on of their own desperate party, and the vile refuse that infested the purlieus of the police courts; that they entered the cottage of the poor, the aged, and the dying (oh, how they love the poor!), and did not hesitate to take away the Family Bible to satisfy the unholy cravings of the Church: yes, they scrupled not to take from a poor and virtuous man, when extended on the bed of death, that Book from which he might have drawn consolation in the hour of trial, when all the efforts of human nature are unable to sustain the mind, and when religion alone can give solace and relief. And

this deed, than which the records of the Inquisition show none more foul, was perpetrated in the cause of—shall I say Religion?—no, but in the cause and by agents of the Established Church. Well may it be said, “O Religion! what crimes have been committed in thy name!”

At the previous election for Rochdale there were feasting and revelry at the public-houses, and there was a sensation of horror ‘which filled every well-disposed mind when all the engines of demoralisation were brought into play to sway the votes of the electors of the borough, when your streets almost ran down with the liquor which robbed the poor deluded creatures who partook of it of their senses; whilst those who infamously furnished it were plundering them of their political rights. You remember that this abominable system sent more than one solitary victim to a premature grave, and that human life itself was not deemed an offering too costly for the altar of political and social depravity.’

‘The recent conduct of the Tories in Parliament is well known to you. Allow me just to remind you that they deem you wholly unqualified to exercise the right of voting with propriety; that they struggled long and hard to prevent the extension of the franchise by the Reform Bill, and that, if occasion offered, they would undoubtedly deprive you of the franchise; that they refuse to allow you any protection for your vote, and will not grant the ballot, which would rescue many electors from their control; that they approve of seven years’ Parliaments, so that the responsibility under which the representative is held to the electors may be as slight as possible; that they support the odious Corn Law by which you are now paying at least fifty per cent. more for your bread than bread of equal quality may be bought for in Paris or Brussels, whilst at the same time foreign States, in retaliation, refuse to admit your goods; thus at once raising the cost of the chief necessary of life, and preventing you from obtaining money to purchase it; that they refuse to yield any one of the just demands of Dissenters, and are determined that you shall still pay to the support of a Church whose services you do not attend, and whose clergy you almost invariably find ranged on the side of your inveterate enemies.’

The writer went on to say that he had drawn once more this old indictment because the Tories were endeavouring to regain possession of their old power. They hoped to make a powerful assistant in this deeply-laid scheme of the Poor Law Amendment Bill. Mr. Bright traced the depravity and wretchedness which existed under the old Poor Laws. A new law had been passed, which on the whole had worked well, and it would be as wise to ask for the repeal of the Reform Bill because riot and bloodshed had taken place at an election in a single borough, as to demand the repeal of the Poor Law on the ground that some few cases of hardship had occurred in carrying its provisions into effect. The Poor Law Amendment Bill was a great and momentous experiment which deserved a fair trial. Now, were the Tories in power, they could not repeal this Act, and their outcry against it was merely a stratagem by which they hoped to create discord amongst reformers. The new law could not work in towns so great a change as it would in the agricultural unions, for in the former places the administration of the old Poor Law was probably as near perfection as it was possible to have it. The writer then briefly sketched the operation of the leading clauses of the Act, and replied to Mr. Fielden's suggestion that no Radical should support any candidate for the representation of the borough who refused to pledge himself to vote for the absolute repeal of the bill. The Tory party had really no fixed opinions upon the measure, but merely used it as a stalking-horse, using it differently in different boroughs. He next referred to the threatened divisions amongst the Liberals; and of the Liberal candidate then before the constituency, Mr. Fenton, remarked that he was a friend to household suffrage, the ballot, and short Parliaments; and that he was in favour of the abolition of the Corn Laws, Church-rates, and abuses of every description. All these points of agreement far outweighed any accordance of opinion which might exist on the single question of the Poor Law Amendment Bill. It was unfortunate that the working classes were inclined to listen to the Tories in this matter. Did they suppose that the Tories had in view the real welfare of the labouring classes, and that the tiger-like character of Toryism had all at once softened down into the mildness of the lamb?

One of their most loquacious converts had lately made the notable discovery that 'the Bible is pre-eminently a Tory book;' but did they suppose that a book which contained the injunction, 'Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you,' and which specially denounced all those that oppressed the poor, could in any way justify a party which had invariably sacrificed the masses for the purposes of self-aggrandisement, and which dared by the iniquitous Corn Law to arrest the course of Heaven, which showered down plenty upon the human race? The Tories had invariably oppressed the people; they had won their confidence only to betray them; and yet, with an effrontery which was perfectly unmatched, they persisted in claiming credit for the best intentions. 'Reformers of Rochdale! you will in all probability soon have an opportunity of redeeming the character of your town, and of wiping off the disgrace of being misrepresented by a man whose inefficiency in Parliament is a fitting sequel to the foul and detestable means which were employed to send him there. If you neglect this opportunity, if from unyielding obstinacy on any one point you are content to sacrifice all the rest, then the deep stigma will cling to you as a poisoned garment, and the very stones of your streets will cry shame upon you.'

Rochdale did not neglect its opportunities in the sense indicated by the address. At the previous election of 1835, Mr. Bright had addressed the electors on behalf of the Liberal candidate in vain. Now, in 1837, the position was reversed. Mr. Fenton, the Liberal candidate, was elected by 374 votes, or a majority of 25 over his opponent, Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Bright's early connection with the Corn Law agitation we shall reserve for separate treatment. It is interesting, however, to note here that in 1840 we find him taking the chair at a great open-air meeting held at Rochdale, when a congratulatory address to Her Majesty upon her marriage was adopted, and three enthusiastic cheers were given for the young Queen. It is not a little singular that although Mr. Bright has frequently been regarded as a Republican in many quarters, he has invariably spoken of his Sovereign with the greatest respect and esteem; and we have already seen that when

a young man, and a member of the Rochdale Literary Society, he brought forward a motion in favour of a limited monarchy.

The question of Church-rates in Rochdale for many years led to scenes of excitement and agitation scarcely paralleled by those arising in connection with any other subject. In the month of June 1834, the usual meeting of the parishioners was convened to pass the accounts of the retiring churchwardens, and to consider the propriety of making a rate for the ensuing year. For some time before this a rate of one penny in the pound had been granted, which the wardens had applied to the repairs of the church. But as it was believed that Church-rates were about to be abolished, it was resolved to collect this year a magnificent sum. The wardens boldly demanded twopence-halfpenny in the pound, and to make this extravagant demand appear less glaring they placed amongst the supposed expenses a sum of £90 for a hearse. This hearse was to be only free to the paupers, the rest of the parish having to pay for it when occasion demanded its use, though the wardens wished them to buy it in the first instance. This sum, together with the salaries of the ringers, organist, &c., absorbed almost the whole of the rate, leaving very little for the repairs of the church, for which only Church-rates should be lawfully collected. The parishioners were determined not to submit to the rate, and a resolution was passed adjourning the meeting to the 23d of June 1835. The wardens demanded a poll, which resulted in a majority of 147 against them, notwithstanding the efforts of the Church party, who spared no pains to bring the voters up, and who in some instances paid the rates due from individuals in order to qualify them to vote for the rate. But in defiance of the clearly expressed wishes of the parish, the wardens proceeded to lay a rate, which, by means of persuasion in some cases and threats in others, was paid in some instances. Many refused to pay, however, and these were summoned before the magistrates, who decided that they had no jurisdiction. The Consistory Court of Chester was then put into operation, but the defendants contended that the proceedings of the wardens were illegal, as only eight out of the ten wardens of the parish had joined in the suit. The Chancellor of the Court overruled the objection, and commanded the defendants

to appear absolutely, upon which the latter appealed to the Archbishop's Court at York. The York Chancellor decided that all the wardens must join in the suit, and reversed the decision of the Chester court, discharging the defendants from the citations. To show the spirit in which the churchwardens conducted this contest, we need only refer to the case mentioned by Mr. Bright, in which they had seized upon, and actually sold, the Bible of a poor old man, then on his death-bed, to satisfy the rate.

Bitter feelings were engendered in the town, and these were not allayed for years. We have cited the above facts in the Church-rate controversy partly to show the spirit that prevailed amongst the official defenders of the rates, and partly because they lead up to one of the most spirited and able speeches delivered by Mr. Bright before taking his seat in the House of Commons. In July 1840, a rate having been decided upon at a meeting of ratepayers, its opponents demanded a poll. At its close, it was found that 3976 had voted for the rate, and 4060 against it. The Church party immediately called another meeting for the 29th of July, for the purpose of laying another rate. On the day named St. Chad's Church was densely crowded. Mr. Bright and others took up a position in the reading-desk, amidst the cheers of their friends; but at length, on account of those not able to procure admittance, it was decided to hold the meeting in the churchyard. In a few moments about six thousand persons were assembled in this last resting-place of the dead. A rate of a halfpenny was proposed, a statement by the vicar's churchwarden to the effect that the foundations of the steeple and the church were unsafe, and giving way, not unnaturally causing some laughter.

Mr. Bright then proposed an amendment, 'That no Church-rate be granted before the 30th day of July 1841, and that this meeting stand adjourned to that day.\*' Touching first upon the legal aspect of the question, the speaker showed that the law did not, and could not, compel the inhabitants of a parish to make a rate. Lord Denman and four other judges had unanimously decided that the

\* There is a copy of this speech by Mr. Bright, printed on a crown folio sheet, and corrected from the *Manchester Times*, in the Rochdale Free Public Library.

power to make a Church-rate existed only in the parishioners. With regard to the vicar's statement, that it was the *intention* of the law that a rate should be laid, Mr. Bright first showed the groundlessness of this, and then effectively turned the tables upon Dr. Molesworth. 'Once on a time,' he said, 'it was ordered by law that whenever a clergyman came into possession of a living he was to pay over the first year's income to a fund for extending the usefulness of the Church. At that time the vicarage of Rochdale was worth under £100 per year, and the first-fruits were paid on that amount. Now, was it not the *intention* of the law that in all future time the first year's income should be devoted to the purpose I have just mentioned? Certainly it was. But what does the vicar, and the rest of his brethren, in the Church? Has he paid, or does he intend to pay, his first year's income; or will he content himself by paying under £100 to that useful fund? How does he satisfy his conscience that he is obeying the *intention* of the law?' Mr. Bright then alluded to the coercion which had been used towards workmen to make them vote for the rate, and asked what language could express his indignation at such conduct. 'You have the form of man, you may have the faculties of man, you may claim the right which your Creator has conferred upon you; but if you are thus coerced, if your judgment and your conscience are thus violated, if your own and your neighbours' interests are struck at and wounded through the very privileges which the law has guaranteed you for their defence,—then you are no longer men; you may crouch and confess yourselves slaves.' The speaker next touched upon the vicar's policy. Notwithstanding his great income, he and his brother-clergymen generally unblushingly charged for administering the sacraments of their Church.

Ebenezer Elliott, the impassioned bard of a great movement, was then pressed into his service by Mr. Bright. 'The vicar has published a handbill, a copy of which I hold in my hands; he quotes Scripture in favour of a rate, and a greater piece of hardihood cannot be imagined: "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," leaving out the latter part of the sentence. I will give you my opinion of the applicability of this passage in a quotation from our excellent friend, the people's poet, Ebenezer Elliott. He says:



"When palaced paupers, sneering, beard the town,  
They preach the Church Tax in a text like this—  
No text more plain—'To Cæsar give his own !'  
Ah, serviles, knavishly the mark they miss,  
And give to Cæsar *ours*—not *theirs*, nor *his* !"

I hold that to quote Scripture in defence of Church-rates is the very height of rashness. The New Testament teems with passages inculcating peace, brotherly love, mutual forbearance, charity, disregard of filthy lucre, and devotedness to the welfare of our fellowmen. In the exaction of Church-rates, in the seizure of the goods of the members of his flock, in the imprisonment of those who refuse to pay, in the harassing process of law and injustice in the Church courts, in the stirrings-up of strife and bitterness among the parishioners,—in all this a clergyman violates the precepts he is paid to preach, and affords a mournful proof of the infirmity or wickedness of human nature.' Pointing to the church near, Mr. Bright thus concluded his address :—

'Fellow-townsmen, I look on that old building—that venerable building, for its antiquity gives it a venerable air—with a feeling of pain. I behold it as a witness of ages gone by, as one of the numberless monuments of the piety or zeal of our ancestors, as a connecting link between this and former ages. I could look on it with a feeling of affection, did I not know that it forms the centre of that source of discord with which our neighbourhood has for years been afflicted, and did it not seem the genial bed wherein strife and bitter jarrings were perpetually produced to spread their baneful influence over this densely-peopled parish ! I would that that venerable fabric were the representative of a really reformed Church—of a Church separated from the foul connection with the State—of a Church depending upon her own resources, upon the zeal of her people, upon the truthfulness of her principles, and upon the blessings of her spiritual Head ! Then would the Church be really free from her old vices ; then would she run a career of brighter and still brightening glory ; then would she unite heart and hand with her sister Churches in this kingdom, in the great and glorious work of evangelising the people of this great empire, and of every clime throughout the world. My friends, the time is coming when a State Church will be unknown in England, and it rests with you to accelerate or retard that happy consummation. I call upon you to gird yourselves for the contest which is impending, for the hour of conflict is approaching when the people of England will be arbiters of their own fate,—when they will have to choose between civil and religious liberty, or the iron hoof, the mental thralldom of a hireling State priesthood. Men of Rochdale, do your duty ! You know what becomes you ! Maintain the great principles you profess to hold dear ; unite with me in the firm resolve that under no possible circum-

stances will you ever pay a Church-rate ; and whatever may await you, prove that good and holy principles can nerve the heart ; and ultimately our cause, your cause, the world's cause, shall triumph gloriously.'

Mr. Bright's amendment was carried by a large majority. The Church party demanded a poll. The contest lasted many days ; acrimonious attacks were indulged in by both parties ; and the most strenuous exertions were made by each. At the close of the last day's poll but one, there appeared 5216 for the rate, and 5212 against. The excitement, consequently, on the following day was completely unexampled in the history of Rochdale. It is stated that votes were on sale to the highest bidder. The 79th Highlanders appeared with fixed bayonets in front of the National School, and this military demonstration led to stone-throwing by the crowd. Mr. Bright, fearful of a rupture between the people and the troops, endeavoured to dissuade the former from violence, but could not be heard. The vicar announced that he should prolong the polling for an hour, but Mr. Bright protested against this, and said that he should object to certain votes which had been taken from persons who had not paid their rates. Dr. Molesworth read the result of the poll as follows : For the rate, 6694 ; against, 6581—majority, 113. This was disputed by the anti-rate party, who claimed a majority of seven. More meetings were held, and at one of them Mr. Bright asked what a savage would think of the religion of the English people, if he had seen one of its ministers, on the previous Saturday night, conducted through the streets by a civil magistrate and the police, amidst the shouts and yells, hissing and hooting, of the insulted people ? The very man who should have been the minister of peace, and inculcated goodwill towards men, had embroiled this extensive parish in almost civil war. At this time there were some in Mr. Bright's employ who had voted in favour of the rate, when some of their fellow-workmen attempted to coerce them ; but Mr. Bright interfered, and said that Churchmen had a right to their own opinions, and to vote as they liked. Ultimately, after legal and other proceedings, the vicar found the opposition too strong for him, and Church-rates in Rochdale were abandoned.

Mr. Bright for some time employed his pen, as well as his voice,

in advocating such reforms as he deemed desirable. The Rev. Dr. Molesworth having launched a periodical under the title of 'Common Sense, or Everybody's Magazine,' an opposition serial was commenced, with the covertly sarcastic title of 'The Vicar's Lantern.' The most frequent contributors to the latter magazine were Mr. Bright and Mr. Oliver Ormerod. Mr. Ormerod, who was one of Mr. Bright's earliest friends, was the author of a very racy book on a visit to the Great Exhibition of 1851, written in the Rochdale dialect. It is referred to now as one of the best specimens of Lancashire humour. In 'The Vicar's Lantern,' Mr. Bright severely handled the articles which appeared in the vicar's magazine. 'The general question of the Corn Law is not to be interfered with,' he wrote on one occasion. 'Of course not. To withhold a few pence of an illegal Church-rate is an offence which cries to Heaven and demands a pamphlet, but to withhold bread from millions of honest men and their families is a general question of no immediate importance.' Again, 'An Act of Uniformity, made by weak and erring mortals to bind the human mind for ever, is a monstrous thing.\* Are mankind to stand still? Are all things to change and to advance, and man alone to rest content with ignorance and superstition and imperfection? Is a parchment church, whilst it drains the purse, to perpetuate error, and to shun as a pestilence the discovery of truth? Is custom to be venerated because it is old, or ought we not rather to affirm with Cyprian that custom without truth is but agedness of error?' Now the Bishops come under his lash. 'When the aristocracy of Britain were draining the country which has so long been afflicted by the pressure of their iron heel, for the purpose of exterminating the germs of liberty in continental Europe, the whole bench of Bishops, with one honourable exception, were their firm allies, and their votes were ever ready in behalf of the war which was desolating the fairest portions of the civilised world.' 'When the question of the abolition of that infamous and accursed traffic in human flesh, the African slave trade, was proposed, it met with great opposition from the bench of Bishops. Their conduct on one occasion drew from Lord Eldon the cutting sarcasm that "the slave trade could not be opposed to Christianity and the precepts of the





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THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN, M.P.

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Gospel, seeing that it was uniformly supported by the right reverend prelates." The writer further observed that he was not surprised the clergy should hate the Anti-Corn Law League, for 'the League is the foe of aristocratic injustice, and the State Church is the creature and tool of the aristocracy.' The following passage must have been particularly distressing to Dr. Molesworth: 'We doubt not that the munificent contribution made in this town to the Great League Fund has had an effect the reverse of soothing upon the nerves of the bread-taxing Vicar of Rochdale. When men refuse at all hazards to pay Church-rates, and yet cheerfully contribute upwards of £2000 to an Anti-Corn-Law League, it indicates a degree of alienation from the "Political Church" which must shock the feelings of every well-paid and comfortable dignitary who nestles within its ample folds. And so it is in Rochdale.'

Whether it was that the Vicar of Rochdale relished the written comments of Mr. Bright upon public and local questions as little as he did his eloquent verbal comments, does not appear, but at any rate 'Common Sense'—the magazine we mean, we are not now discussing the quality—disappeared. The opposition journal followed suit in a few months, the editor in its epitaph remarking, 'We rejoice that amidst the dangers and difficulties that have beset our path we are at length enabled in peaceful triumph to place the extinguisher with our own hand upon the "Vicar's Lantern."' This grappling with local questions had not been without its uses—leading to quickness of intellectual fence,—but still sterner work than crushing local opponents was soon to demand Mr. Bright's attention.

Towards the close of 1839 Mr. Bright was married to Miss Elizabeth Priestman, daughter of Mr. Jonathan Priestman, of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. By this lady he had one daughter, Helen, who married Mr. W. S. Clarke, of Street, in Somersetshire. Mrs. Bright died in the year 1841, and was buried in the graveyard belonging to the Friends at Rochdale. While sorrowing under this heavy bereavement he again saw Mr. Cobden, and their meeting has thus been described, with simple pathos, by Mr. Bright:—'At that time I was at Leamington, and on the day when Mr.



Cobden called on me—for he happened to be there at the same time on a visit to some relations—I was in the depth of grief, I might almost say of despair, for the light and sunshine of my house had been extinguished. All that was left on earth of my young wife, except the memory of a sainted life and of a too brief happiness, was lying still and cold in the chamber above us. Mr. Cobden called on me as my friend, and addressed me as you might suppose with words of condolence. After a time, he looked up and said, "There are thousands of homes in England at this moment where wives, mothers, and children are dying of hunger. Now when the first paroxysm of your grief is past I would advise you to come with me, and we will never rest until the Corn Law is repealed." The untiring and devoted manner in which this appeal was responded to we shall hereafter see.

In the same year as his first marriage, Mr. Bright built his residence of One Ash, Rochdale. The reason for this curious designation is very simply explained. Near the house is a single tree, an ash, and the name was adopted in remembrance of his ancestor, John Gratton, of Monyash, in Derbyshire. At this place, and amidst congenial pursuits, he has, at the close of each session, sought recreation and the renewal of that physical health which of recent years has been seriously encroached upon by the pressure of his public duties.

## CHAPTER III.

*ELECTED FOR DURHAM.*

Mr. Bright's first Election Contest.—Cause of his non-success.—His Opponent, Lord Dungannon.—Mr. Bright the Popular Candidate.—Lord Dungannon unseated.—Second Election in July 1843.—A singular Conservative Candidate.—Mr. Bright's Election Addresses.—Scene at the Hustings.—Election Pleasantries.—Return of Mr. Bright.—A Free-Trade Triumph.—Rejoicings.—Great Meeting in London.



THE able and vigorous part which Mr. Bright took in the Anti-Corn Law agitation naturally led to the conclusion amongst his friends that he must have a seat in Parliament. By the year 1842 it began to be apparent that he would be a power in public life. 'He is earnest, argumentative, eloquent,' said one who spoke with prophetic instinct, 'clear in statement, apt in illustration, fluent in words, abundant in resources. Mr. John Bright is in talent a second Peel; he was born in the same atmosphere. Let his career be observed—he has entered upon it.' Men should generally distrust prophecies, but there was plenty of ground for this one. Mr. Bright had already impressed both his friends and his foes with a sense of his power. If Mr. Cobden might be described as the Paul, Mr. Bright was certainly the Apollos, of the League.

The opportunity of contesting a seat in the Legislature came sooner than was anticipated. In March 1843, Captain Fitzroy, member for the city of Durham, resigned his seat in consequence of having accepted the appointment of Governor of New Zealand. An address from Lord Dungannon, in the Protectionist and Conservative interest, immediately appeared. It seemed as though his lordship would enjoy a walk-over, but only on the very day of the

nomination an address to the electors from Mr. Bright was published. It was written in plain and forcible language, pointing out the special reasons why the representation of the city should be contested. The paragraph which attracted most attention in this first election address of the future statesman was the following: 'I need not allude to the attempt which is making to degrade you into the convenient tool of an aristocratic family—to employ your suffrages to place a man in Parliament as a stepping-stone to the governorship of a colony, and then to hand you over, as it were by "private contract," to another, who in his address considers your sentiments and your judgment of so little importance that he does not even condescend to explain the principles by which his political course will be guided! It is for you to determine whether you will become an instrument for the exaltation of those who have no interests or sympathies in common with your own; or whether you will assert your right to be a free and independent constituency, using your electoral power to maintain the liberties and protect the interests of yourselves and of your country.'

Lord Dungannon had been canvassing for a week, whereas Mr. Bright's canvass barely extended over the space of two hours and a half, before he met his friends to depart for the hustings. The nomination took place on April 3, when a crowd of four thousand persons assembled in front of the hustings, the Liberal candidate being accompanied by troops of friends. After the nominations had been completed, Lord Dungannon, who was a nominee of the Marquis of Londonderry, first addressed the electors, the burden of his speech being that they knew his principles, and that he had no new pledges to offer. Mr. Bright then stepped forward, and being manifestly the popular candidate, he was received with great cheering. 'I come before you,' he said, after one or two preliminary remarks, 'more particularly as an opponent of every description of monopoly, but still more particularly of that most infamous of all monopolies which obstructs the supply of food to the people of this country, for the sole purpose of aggrandising a class. I believe that that class is mistaken, and that the time will come when they will see that injustice to other classes of their countrymen will not, in the long run,

benefit their own. But this law is calculated, I am persuaded, to inflict the most appalling suffering upon the great body of the working classes.' He demanded their support for any man who came forward to break down this monopoly, and expressed his great surprise that Lord Dungannon had not uttered one word upon the great question that was already exciting more interest than any other among the intelligent portion of the population. He then proceeded to show the evils of the protective system, which the noble lord supported. 'At this moment there are thirteen hundred thousand paupers in England and Wales. The mover of the noble lord (Prebendary Townsend) spoke of this country as being a great and a free and a prosperous and a wealthy nation. Another gentleman, who is also of the profession of the hon. mover, told us not long ago that there are five millions of our countrymen living on oats, and that five millions are *rejoicing* on potatoes. If Lord Dungannon were sent to Parliament, he would again say "aye" to any motion to keep up the price of the working man's bread, whilst nothing would be done to keep up the rate of his wages. Now, if there be not food for all, some must go short—and they must be the working classes, and the poorest of those classes; while if the repeal of the Corn Law were followed by five or ten millions of quarters entering the country, there would be plenty for all—not one need go short; and, instead of rejoicing in oats and potatoes, all might rejoice in wheaten bread. Men were almost fighting with each other for employment and wages and food.' 'And no power under heaven can diminish that competition, or give increased comfort, or cause a steady demand for labour, unless it be the repeal of that law which diminishes the demand for labour, reduces wages, makes you compete with each other constantly and of necessity, and turns the whole force and beggary of this competition into the means of increasing the rental of the noble lords and landlords who made that law.'

This and other passages of Mr. Bright's speech were received with rapturous cheering. After some further observations, the following episode occurred :—

'The noble lord comes forward on "free and independent principles." (*Much laughter.*) There is no one more in favour of those principles than I am. But I hold

that freedom and that independence to be a freedom and an independence of all outward influence, and a perfect reliance upon the good opinion of the whole of the constituency. Now, I am afraid that, being a stranger here, I may have misunderstood the facts; but I gather there has been something like a contract, by which the electors of this renowned and ancient borough are made subservient to the interests of a certain aristocratic family. (Loud cheers, and cries of "No" and "Yes," in the midst of which Lord Dungannon spoke a few words to Mr. Bright across the Mayor.) The noble lord says there is no such contract. I do not for one moment mean to say that it is any matter of writing, or that there is any direct contract. I merely mean to say that there is a sort of understanding.'

*Lord Dungannon.* 'Does the gentleman now opposed to me— (Cries of "Order, order!" and a remark, "Wait till Mr. Bright has done, and then reply.") If the gentleman now opposed to me asserts that I am come here under any contract from any man, or dependent upon any man, I say that he asserts that which is totally destitute of foundation.' (Cheers, hissing, and a voice said, 'You know it's true.')

*Mr. Bright.* 'I have read with very great amusement and interest the addresses which have been published. One of them was published by your late-member, in which he speaks of the many sad reflections occasioned by his appointment; so sad, that I do not think any one in your Assize Courts, going out to New Zealand, could have written in more plaintive terms. (*Great laughter.*) I do not wish to insinuate for a moment that there has been anything in the way of bargain and sale of the constituency; but I do say that the whole transaction makes it evident that there are some parties who think it is not a difficult matter to transfer the constituency of Durham from one candidate to another.'

Mr. Bright went on to say that he was in favour of such laws as should prevent honest and sober and industrious men from sinking from a state of independence into poverty and pauperism and degradation. He liked prevention infinitely better than cure. The speaker then said he felt convinced that grave calamities were impending over the country, unless representatives were sent to Parliament to support the principles which he had been advocating. 'I confidently hope,' he said in conclusion, 'not so much on my own account as on account of the principles I hold, that by to-morrow evening you will have told the world that you are not in favour of monopoly; that you will uphold no protection which, stripped of all its ambiguity, is plain and simple robbery of one class for the benefit of another; that you are willing to co-operate with Nottingham (where I hope the electors will this week do their duty by returning a free-trader to Parliament—Mr. Gisborne, who will be known to many of you); and that the voice you and they shall raise against the giant evil of your country shall spread through the length and

breadth of the island and the empire, and pronounce that the reign of monopoly, of oppression, of disregard to the rights of the working classes, and of total subserviency to an oligarchy which has brought this mischief on the country,—pronounce that that reign is absolutely and for ever at an end.’

The cheering which followed was most protracted, and for some minutes the Mayor was not able to call for a show of hands. The demonstration in favour of Lord Dungannon was a mere sprinkling in the crowd, while for Mr. Bright it appeared as if the whole assemblage had simultaneously held up their hands. The Tories demanded a poll, which was fixed to take place on the following day. A local journal observed that the account of the proceedings ought not to be closed ‘without a strong animadversion on the ungentlemanly conduct of Lord Dungannon’s friends while Mr. Bright was speaking. It showed downright ill-breeding, and an utter determination to conduct the struggle with recklessness of principle and gross discourtesy to an honourable opponent.’ The result of the poll proved that while Mr. Bright had excited a strong feeling in his favour, he had come forward too late to win the seat. The numbers were: for Lord Dungannon, 507; for Mr. Bright, 405;—majority, 102. At the close of the poll, Mr. Bright addressed the people in the market-place. Amidst general applause, he said he affirmed with confidence that if he had been in the field as long as the noble lord, the result of the poll would have been very different. A large majority of the electors were liberal in principle, and in favour of Free Trade. Referring to the attitude of the clergy on the question of the Corn Laws, he said, ‘It is a most unhappy circumstance that any body of men holding their position in society, assuming sacred functions, professing themselves the ministers of the purest system of morality and religion ever known upon earth, men who call upon you to leave the grovelling things of earth, and all the miserable dross and tinsel by which you are surrounded; to direct your thoughts to higher and holier objects; to carry your aspirations towards heaven rather than stoop to the things of earth,—I say it is a misfortune that by a law made by the Parliament of the country, this body of men, especially appointed to take charge of the flock,

should, instead of being the shepherds, appear to all men's eyes as the shearers of the flock ; and that their enormous influence should, in almost all the parishes of England, be bound up in the conservation of the most odious, the most unjust, the most oppressive, and most destructive enactment which was ever recorded upon the statute-book of this or any other country.'

Mr. Bright closed by thanking the electors, and tendering them friendly counsels, especially warning them against those who might corrupt the constituency. He then proceeded to his hotel. His enthusiastic reception induced him there to enter the balcony 'with the intention of once more, in a few words, bidding his friends farewell ; but the eagerness of his auditory, who seemed delighted with his powerful eloquence, drew him on from point to point, until his remarks formed another and most effective speech.' As an example of Mr. Bright's energy, we may mention that on the day following his arduous labours at Durham, he addressed an immense assemblage at Drury Lane Theatre, London, upon the question of the Corn Laws.

Lord Dungannon's triumph at Durham was very short-lived. Being petitioned against, he was unseated on the ground of bribery by his agents, and a new election took place in July. Mr. Bright at once again took the field, and was opposed on Tory principles by a Mr. Purvis, a barrister. If the learned gentleman made as poor a figure forensically as he did politically, his clients were greatly to be pitied. From a faithful report of his oration before his friends, we cull these few choice flowers of rhetoric : 'I have been received in Durham with the strongest enthusiasm. I have nailed my colours to the mast ; and come what blue there may' (blue was the Liberal colour), 'here I am, and I will support the cause to the last. I have been received enthusiastically. They have all voted for me. (A voice : "The poll has not come yet.") The promises I have received make my election certain ; and I have got the women with me, every one. I have seen their smiles ; I have seen their eyes ; and I know from their very looks they have told me they are all for me. And how can a cause supported by the beauty of Durham fail ? We cannot fail.' Mr. Purvis was both premature and indiscreet in

claiming the support of all the ladies of Durham ; and his remarks on this score led to a great deal of pleasantry at his expense. Caricatures appeared, showing Mr. Purvis at every point of his negotiations with the ladies, as described in his speech, viz., witnessing their smiles, looking into their eyes, &c. It is easy to imagine what kind of opponent this would be in the hands of Mr. Bright. The Tories themselves scarcely knew what to make of him, and were ashamed of his ridiculous appearance.

Mr. Bright, in addressing his friends, said it would not be necessary for him to refer at length to the circumstances which had necessitated a new election—a statement which was received with laughter, as the electors remembered the fate of Lord Dungannon. The electoral franchise was worth nothing whatever, unless freely given ; and he asked the electors, according to their honest convictions, to give their suffrages in his favour. Examining the address of his opponent, and referring to the doctrines of the party with whom he was associated, Mr. Bright said : ‘ If I were an elector of this borough, I would say, “ I am as independent a man as any lord in the land. My vote is my own, for the good of my country. I am not bound to follow in the wake of this lord, or of that party. I must use my own powers of reflection. I must find out what it were best for me to do. And as I must answer at the bar of public opinion—and answer, hereafter, at a tribunal where there can be no deception—I am bound to vote according to my conscience for that man who I believe will best promote the interests of the country of which I am a citizen.” He could bring hundreds and thousands of working men, their wives and families, who would go down upon their knees, and ask them to vote for the man who would support the repeal of those laws which were destroying your trade and their trade—your prosperity and their prosperity.’ Mr. Bright went on to avow himself the political friend of the working classes, and of the freemen of the borough, and he had not a sympathy in common with any lord in the neighbourhood. He had a deep, settled, and unchanging sympathy with those whose only property was their labour, and whose only income was their wages. ‘ Rich and great people,’ continued the candidate, ‘ can take care of themselves ; but



the poor and defenceless—the men with small cottages and large families—the men who must work six days every week, if they are to live in anything like comfort for a week,—these men want defenders; they want men to maintain their position in Parliament; they want men who will protest against any infringement of their rights, and who will on all occasions stand by them as the guardians of the rights of that community of which you are the representatives. Now I ask you, electors, to consider these points. Do not consider them with reference to me, consider them with reference to yourselves. Think of your wives, and of your children, for whom you labour; who live out of the produce of your industry. Think of them; think what they suffer from bad laws, and that they might be comfortable under good laws. And if you are of opinion that the principles which I have propounded to you are such as are likely to advance your interests, then I fearlessly, and without any immodesty, ask you, when the day of election shall come, to register your votes in my favour, as the representative of those principles.'

The next and concluding passage of Mr. Bright's speech possesses both a public and a special autobiographical interest. 'We are bound together by the same interests,' he observed. 'We are made happy or miserable by the same means. What brings comfort to your homes, must bring plenty and comfort to mine. What gives security to your interests, and your enjoyments, must equally give security to mine. I am a working man as much as you. My father was as poor as any man in this crowd. He was of your own body entirely. He boasts not—nor do I—of birth, nor of great family distinctions. What he has made, he has made by his own industry and successful commerce. What I have, comes from him, and from my own exertions. I have no interest in the extravagance of government; I have no interest in seeking appointments under any government; I have no interest in pandering to the views of any government; I have nothing to gain by being the tool of any party. I come before you as the friend of my own class and order; as one of the people; as one who would, on all occasions, be the firm defender of your rights, and the asserter of all those privileges to which you are justly entitled. It is on these grounds that I offer

myself to your notice; it is on these grounds that I solicit your suffrages;—it is for this alone, the assertion of my principles, and the maintenance of my opinions, that I am prepared to sacrifice the comforts of my present mode of life—to give up a home which is dear to me—to leave a family which is dear to me—and to part with comforts which cannot be enjoyed by any man who takes a prominent part in public affairs. It is for the maintenance of those principles that I am here in your city. I will buy no votes. I don't wish them, unless they are given freely. I am persuaded that the majority of those who hear me rejoice that corruption is at an end in the city of Durham. It would be an insult to nineteen out of every twenty of the men in this assemblage if I were to say or to think otherwise. I know perfectly well that you have honest wishes, and would like to be independent. I am sure that a vast proportion of you are in favour of honesty and independence in the exercise of the elective franchise. There have been men to whom I have been pointed out as their enemy, because I am here in consequence of the overthrow of a system which faction had created. But I do not come here to ask for the vote of any man who I believe for a moment could think that a paltry, absurd, ridiculous, bad custom should be put into the balance against the rights, and the interests, and the prosperity of this great community. On these grounds, then, I come before you. I intend to canvass, if possible, every elector; and I trust that when the poll is declared from yonder window, or wherever the Mayor may determine, the opinions of the electors of Durham will be declared to be in favour of justice, and mercy, and truth, as applied to legislation in this country; instead of that cruel, and unjust, and merciless system of monopoly and extravagance under which we have so long laboured.'

There is no speech by Mr. Bright in his early electioneering campaigns which more clearly, if indeed so clearly, sets forth his relations to the great working-class constituency as this particular Durham speech. In that address he distinctly promulgates the grounds upon which he had at all a right to challenge public sympathy. While justly warm, perhaps, as one of his temperament must necessarily be, over the peculiar forms of oppression current, he was

never that offensive partisan which has too frequently been represented. It may be maintained by some that the model politician is he who considers the claims of both parties from a far distance ; but in periods of crisis it is not the careful weighing of political axioms, but action, that is requisite. The country had arrived at such a crisis when Mr. Bright was contesting Durham in 1843, and it behoved him to speak out, and to speak boldly and uncompromisingly. This he unquestionably did ; and there is no political address by the right hon. gentleman which demands more careful perusal than the one from which we have quoted. It had less of appeal to feelings than to principles ; and yet the closing passage above extracted, while convincing from the argumentative point of view, is still more conclusive and admirable from that nobly-apologetic side which has since been illustrated by such distinguished examples as those of Cardinal Newman and Mr. Gladstone.

For two days Mr. Bright was now actively engaged in canvassing, but on the evening of the second day he delivered another stirring address to the electors. ' I am one,' he said, ' who has been taught to believe—and the longer I live, the more convinced I am that that belief has a just foundation—that there is no bad law which can be passed by Government whose influence is not felt even in the smallest cottage in the most remote part of the country. It is said sometimes—or some poet has said—I forget the exact quotation, but the meaning of it is—

“ How small a part of ills which men endure  
Are those which kings or laws can make or cure.”

Now I believe there are laws in this country, some of which have wrought much evil ; and that by a removal of those evil laws, and the substitution of good ones, great evil might be done away with, and great good produced.' The speaker then referred to the suffering in Durham, and the lack of employment, remarking that the interests of the electors had heretofore been sacrificed at the shrine of party. Now he (Mr. Bright) came before them entirely unconnected with either or with any party in the State. He would support no ministry as a ministry. They could have no interest in

Sir Robert Peel remaining in power, unless he did something to bring about a better state of things in the country, and ensure just and impartial government. He was no enemy of Sir Robert Peel; he only spoke of him in his capacity of Prime Minister. With regard to the coal duty, the candidate observed that it was nothing but direct plunder of certain property in Northumberland and Durham; and it was put on for the purpose of staving off for a time the abolition of the Corn Laws, and of the sugar and coffee monopolies. 'I think when men are obliged to immure themselves deep in mines, until they almost forget that a sun was made, that they of all men have a right to demand of any government that no tax should be placed upon what they bring up from the mine, in order that the demand for that commodity may not be diminished—that their wages may not fall—and that their families may not derive less of the comforts they are entitled to from those hard and dangerous labours in which they are engaged.'

From this passage of his speech, which was warmly appreciated, Mr. Bright went on to reply to certain objections which had been raised against Free Trade. One of his points was received with loud laughter and cheering. 'I have heard of a waiter,' he remarked, 'who was so exceedingly clever, that it was said he could pack a quart of wine into a pint bottle; but I never heard of any one who was clever enough to get a quart of wine out of a pint bottle. And don't you know that in the case of a deficient harvest, the landowner, being the strongest, will get his share as long as he can; that the farmer, being the next strongest, will get his share of what the farm produces as long as he can; that the labourer, being the weakest, must come in for the greatest share of the scarcity which is caused by the deficient harvest?' Mr. Bright then quoted passages from a speech made by a Mr. Munday, a large farmer near Andover, to prove that it was worse than folly, it was a crime, to assert that the labourers on a farm were benefited in any way by high prices and scarcity. Every man who refused to vote for the abolition of such a system as this, which by law made famine—which doomed hundreds and thousands of honest men and their families to the utmost destitution which could possibly be imagined.

—was not a freeman ; nor did he wish to make others free. The speaker next dwelt upon the necessity for the ballot, for he had himself discovered that a wide system of intimidation prevailed. Two candidates had recently stood for Nottingham on the principle of purity of election—Joseph Sturge and Mr. Gisborne—and the latter had now been returned. Why could not the men of Durham act in the same way ? Towards the conclusion of his address, Mr. Bright made the following appeal, which greatly moved the attentive crowd of listeners :—

‘I have found, as I said before, suffering among you, and believe it arises from bad laws ; and I believe that that suffering may be removed. I have seen in your houses a great number of little children ; and some of them reminded me of one I have at home ; and I am sure that my child is no dearer to me than your children are to you. I have seen some that looked as if born in poverty. I saw one cradle to-day, with a little child in it, that almost brought the tears to my eyes to see the little clothing it had about it. It was well it was summer, or it must have suffered greatly from the cold. Well, now, if a man have three or four children, he has just three or four times as much interest in having the Corn Law abolished as the man who has none. Your children will grow up to be men and women. It may be that your heads will be laid in the grave before they come to manhood or womanhood ; but they will grow up, and want employment at honest trades—want houses and furniture, and food and clothing, and all the necessaries and comforts of life. They will be honest and industrious as yourselves. But the difficulties which surround you will be increased tenfold by the time they have arrived at your age. Trade will then have become still more crippled ; the supply of food still more diminished ; the taxation of the country still further increased. The great lords, and some other people, will have become still more powerful, unless the freemen and electors of Durham and of others places stand to their guns, and resolve that, whatever may come of Queen, or Lords, or Commons, or Church, or anybody,—great and powerful, and noble though they be,—the working classes will stand by the working classes ; and having the honesty to live by the work of their own hands, will stand up for the rights of honest industry ; and will no longer lay themselves down in the dust to be trampled upon by the iron heel of monopoly, and have their very lives squeezed out of them by evils such as I have described.’

At a later meeting, Mr. Bright stated that a deputation from the ironworkers of Staffordshire (who were in no better position than the coalworkers) had had an interview with Sir Robert Peel, to lay before him the distressed condition of the trade, and the appalling state of destitution into which the people were being plunged. Sir Robert said he could do nothing for them ; he would take the sub-

ject into consideration; he sympathised marvellously with them; but he had no remedy for their distresses. All this misery arose from causes which he (Mr. Bright) had often pointed out. The evil was due to bad government. 'You have in this country all that should make you the most prosperous and contented people under heaven. Providence has blessed you abundantly. Your prayers for daily bread—your prayers for every blessing upon your country—have been answered long ago from heaven. But there is another power which arrests the bounty of heaven, and dooms the children of our common Father, by hundreds of thousands, to intolerable suffering, when He has designed for them every great and continued happiness and enjoyment.'

The nomination took place on the 24th of July. Mr. Bright and his supporters first appeared at the hustings, and the cheers with which they were greeted lasted for some minutes. His opponent, Mr. Purvis, whose chief distinction seems to have been that he brought amusement into the contest, exhibited singular nervousness in mounting the steps to the hustings, and his reception when there was such as would have discouraged a much bolder man. The Tory candidate, however, to his credit be it said, went through his uncomfortable experiences very good-humouredly. Mr. Bright himself was in excellent form all through the proceedings—enjoying the fun which was then inseparable from a nomination day at an English election, and even contributing to it himself.

Mr. John Henderson proposed, and Mr. William Shields seconded, the nomination of Mr. Bright; and Mr. J. W. Hays proposed, and Mr. John Forster seconded, that of Mr. Thomas Purvis, who for some inscrutable reason appears to have been always called 'Billy'—a name which invariably evoked roars of laughter. Mr. Bright first addressed the assembly, and began by calling upon the electors to decide whether they would support the rights and interests of the people in general, or give their power and influence to a class which had already far too much power and influence in the country. He then proceeded to overhaul the opinions of his opponent, respecting which great difficulty of accurate knowledge existed. When asked, during the delivery of his addresses,

what those opinions were, he referred the electors to his handbills; and on turning to the handbills, he (Mr. Bright) found that Mr. Purvis merely engaged to support these Conservative principles which had placed the present Administration in power. In fact, he might say in the words of the poet,

‘All that we know is, nothing can be known.’

Mr. Bright then went on to show what the principles of the Ministry were, and how their present policy left the working classes in a condition of great suffering. He also referred to the condition of Ireland, and to the great bill of the session, the Irish Arms Bill. If there are still some who could for a moment doubt Mr. Bright's deep friendliness and sympathy for the Irish people, let them turn back to these words in his Durham speech, anticipatory of his later utterances :—

‘What is the condition of Ireland? Two millions of her children are paupers; and yet it is a magnificent island, with a soil more fertile than the country in which we live—with a soil capable of producing anything, and blessed, almost above every other country, with abundance by Providence; and with a people (though I need not tell you what they are), generous, warm-hearted, intelligent, honest, and virtuous, and probably, at this moment, more sober than the people of any other country in the world. What do the Irish people complain of? Of no employment, because the Conservative policy of England has destroyed the manufactures of Ireland. They complain of the Established Church in Ireland as a grievance; and so it must be admitted to be, when only one in ten of the population belong to the Church. It is just as unfair to have a Protestant establishment sweeping up the ecclesiastical revenues there, as it would be for a Romish establishment in England to sweep up all the ecclesiastical revenues of this island. The people of Ireland also believe that in the administration of the law they have not impartial justice done to them. They complain, moreover, that they are badly used by their landlords, and that they are turned out of their cottages. We have seen it stated lately, by an Irishman who is my representative in the House of Commons, that not less than seventy thousand persons have been turned out in one year in Ireland, from the cottages which they had lived in from their birth; that landlords, to consolidate their farms, and drive away the miserable people, had ejected them from their cottages—forced them out, with their wives and children, on to the highways and to the streets, having taken down their cottages—yea, driven a ploughshare over the homesteads of these unfortunate people; and when these people cry aloud to Government for redress, that Government has nothing to offer them but an Arms Bill.’

Yet all this policy, continued the speaker, his opponent would sup-

port. He for his part asked the electors to stand forward and become standard-bearers in that great army of justice and right which was already marching forward to the deliverance of the country. Mr. Bright repeated his previous declaration that he was no party man, and that he came not at the call of any ministry. He had buried all his other politics for a time, and asked for their suffrages on the ground that he was a Free Trader alone. Some men found a seat in Parliament a stepping-stone to other offices more lucrative; but all the office he sought was to be a representative of the people. 'Justice and impartiality to all' was his motto; and so long as he had memory and voice to express an opinion, so long would he clamour against the oppression which existed, and in favour of the rights of the great body of the people. Then followed this amusing—and yet not altogether amusing—passage:—

'If I understand Mr. Purvis's opinions—and I confess that from the fog, the mist, and the gloom with which he has contrived to enshroud them, I find great difficulty in discovering what they are—(*laughter*)—I suspect strongly that if by a majority of votes he be declared member for Durham, he will immediately enrol himself as a member of that Pro-Corn-Law Club which sits in St. Stephen's; and whose main business it is to raise the price of your food, and to lower the rate of your wages. (*Cheers.*) The Corn Law is a famine law. Why do the landlords say it will do them harm if it be repealed? Because it would lower the price of food. It would lower the price by bringing more food into the market. If that be true, it must be quite true that it raises the price of corn by keeping it out of the market. And if the law keep corn out of the market, then it must make food more scarce than it would be if such a law did not exist. And this making of food scarce, is what I call making a famine by law. (*Hear, hear, and cheers.*) Now I ask you, as I did the last time I was here—I ask you, working-men and freemen of Durham, who gets all the scarcity when there is a scarcity of food? ("The poor man," promptly answered a voice from the crowd.) My honourable opponent and myself bear no signs of having suffered from scarcity. (*Laughter*—both the gentlemen having a tendency to *plumpness*.) I daresay we have hardly ever known, for this many a year, the luxury of feeling right hungry. (*Laughter.*) Many a man in both Houses of Parliament may suffer from eating too much; but I will be bound that none of them feel the consequences of eating too little. (*Great laughter and cheers.*)'

In the case of scarcity and famine, it was the working man, not Mr. Purvis or himself, who would need to go to oatmeal or potatoes. If the existing laws were not repealed, there would be still less trade and lower wages; more suffering, more pauperism, more union work-



houses, and more of all life afflictions which all men had a natural desire to shun.

‘There was once a law passed through Parliament for the protection of dogs from being stolen. (*Laughter.*) There were some very heavy penalties attached to it, one of which was this, that any person guilty of offending against the Act should be punished by having inflicted upon him fifty or a hundred lashes; one-half to go to the informer, and the other half to the poor of the parish! (*Peals of laughter.*) Well, now, the Corn Law is one of this kind of things. It gives all the afflictions which it creates and encourages “to the poor of the parish.” (*Hear, hear.*) I ask you to do what you can to abolish that law. (*Cheers.*)’

By and by the farmers would declare that they would no longer be defrauded; for they must see that their best customers were the manufacturing and trading population; and that when, from want of work, and consequent want of wages, that population could not buy their agricultural produce, their own ruin—as high rentals continued—stared them in the face. Mr. Bright then stated that his own principles were, briefly,—freedom of trade, justice to all classes of the people, impartiality in the administration of the laws, a Government to protect and not to oppress, and all those principles which were truly and really conservative of all that is worthy of conservation beneath the dominion of the British Crown. Then, in the course of an impassioned peroration, occurred this passage:—

‘I have seen the freemen of your city looking disconsolate and sad. Their hands were ready to labour, their skill was ready to produce all that their trade demanded. They were as honest and as industrious as any men in this assemblage; but no man hired them. They were in a state of involuntary idleness, and were driving fast to the point of pauperism. I have seen their wives, too, with three or four children about them,—one in the cradle, one at the breast. I have seen their countenances. I have seen the signs of their sufferings. I have seen the emblems and the symbols of affection, such as I did not expect to see in this city. Aye! and I have seen those little children who, at a not distant day, will be the men and women of the city of Durham—I have seen their poor little wan faces and anxious looks, as if the furrows of old age were coming upon them before they had escaped from the age of childhood. I have seen all this in your city; and I have seen far more than this in the neighbourhood from which I come. You have seen, in all probability, people from my neighbourhood walking your streets and begging for that bread which the Corn Law would not allow them to earn.

“Bread-taxed weaver! let us see  
What hath bread-tax done for thee,

And thy children, vilely led,  
Singing hymns for shameful bread,  
Till the stones of every street  
Know their little naked feet."

This is what the Corn Law does for the weavers of my neighbourhood ; and for the weaver and the artisan of yours. Yes, men of Durham ! yes, freemen and electors ! I implore you—on my bended knees I would ask you, for your sakes, not mine—for, personally, it is not to me the value of this piece of paper which way the election ends ; upon principle, I ask you to claim for yourselves and for your families the right to have that cheap and wholesome food which a merciful and wise God has supplied for both poor and rich, and upon which they might have been happy and comfortable if His wise laws had not been infringed by human power ; I ask you now, before it be too late—now that you have an opportunity—now, when your countrymen, from the furthest ends of the empire, are turning anxious looks to the accounts received from this ancient and renowned city ;—I ask you on behalf of yourselves and your homes—on behalf of millions of suffering families—on behalf of the principles of justice and humanity—I ask you, I implore you, to cast away all party feeling—to come forward to the poll to-morrow, to register your votes in a cause on which, I believe, hangs the salvation of our common country ; and by which, if you are but true to it and to yourselves, you will strike a blow which may be followed up by many other counties, and cities, and boroughs of the kingdom ; and the cloud which at this moment overhangs our social horizon be swept away for ever. And as, at this moment, those clouds which soar above us temporarily obscure the rays of the glorious sun, so the clouds which now overhang this unhappy country shall be dispelled, and the radiant beams of that glorious orb of commercial freedom which gives life, and health, and joy to all, shall shine again upon the people of this country, and England shall once more be great, and happy, and free.'

Mr. Bright's oratory has perhaps gathered in depth and intensity since he gave utterance, when thirty-two years of age only, to this speech ; but he has probably never surpassed it for the exhibition of all those qualities which make an election address truly powerful—viz., pathos, humour, eloquence, and that general adaptability of the whole to the audience, as regards its arguments and appeals, which never fails of success. A tolerable proficient in the art of platform speaking would have found it somewhat difficult to follow him upon this occasion ; but Mr. Purvis laboured under unusual difficulties. If he could have answered Mr. Bright's arguments, well and good ; but if not, it would have been much better to have delivered a speech on the old lines, and have done with it. Mr. Purvis chose the former course, much to his own discomfiture. The running fire of derisive laughter with which his answer to Mr. Bright was received demonstrated its value. This is the kind of platform nonsense that

prevailed through Mr. Purvis's speech: 'No doubt my hon. opponent has seen all the distress that he relates. No doubt that he has seen all the two millions of paupers he talks of, including the "wasted babies" of Durham. Now, I have canvassed Durham—not so much as him—but I have canvassed it; I have been in the midst of the healthy and handsome people of Durham—(roars of laughter)—and I know nothing of those wasted babies and poor, pale-faced women whom my hon. opponent speaks of.' (Laughter, and a remark, 'Thou's blind, Billy.') A statement that Mr. Bright had said nothing of his principles was received with shouts of laughter, as also was another statement that he (Mr. Purvis) was thoroughly independent.

When the show of hands was taken, all the assembly, with the exception of some twenty or thirty people, was in favour of Mr. Bright. A poll was of course demanded, and it took place on the following day. The Tories put forth all their efforts, but Mr. Bright was returned by a majority of seventy-eight, the numbers being, Bright, 488; Purvis, 410. The successful candidate's reception at the Town Hall was most enthusiastic. Durham market-place was crowded beyond all precedent, and when Mr. Bright appeared outside on the hustings, the cheering and waving of hats were continued for several minutes, and seemed almost irrepressible. The new member returned thanks, affirming that that day's poll would do more to strike a telling blow at the protection, or rather the plunder of trade system under which the country had been labouring—a stronger and a deadlier blow than any election which had hitherto taken place. He concluded by quoting these spirited lines of Shelley—a poet whose appreciative readers were at that time very few:—

'Men of England, heirs of glory,  
Heroes of unwritten story,  
Nurslings of one mighty mother,  
Hopes of her and one another!

'Rise, like lions after slumber,  
In unvanquishable number,  
Shake your chains to earth like dew,  
Which in sleep had fallen on you:  
Ye are many—they are few.'

Although Mr. Bright came forward on such pronounced principles, we find that amongst those who voted for him were Mr. Granger, the second member for the city, the Dean of Durham, and Mr. Prebendary Ogle. After the declaration of the poll, the hon. member went in procession in an open carriage round the market-place, up the Bailey, through the College, and afterwards through the principal streets of the town, attended by an immense concourse of people, cheering enthusiastically at every step. He alighted at the Waterloo Hotel, where he received an ovation from probably the largest meeting ever assembled in Durham. He briefly addressed the vast crowd, congratulating them that the cloud which had hung over the city had been removed. He begged them in their politics to act upon the golden rule that whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.

The election caused considerable excitement throughout the country, and it elevated greatly the hopes and the courage of the Anti-Corn-Law League party. Addresses and resolutions of thanks poured in upon the electors of Durham from all parts of the country. In Mr. Bright's native town of Rochdale the rejoicing was naturally great, but the most important demonstration in connection with the election was held in London, at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, Strand. It was called 'for the purpose of congratulating the electors of the city of Durham on the recent victory they had so nobly achieved for the cause of Free Trade by returning John Bright, Esq., as their representative to Parliament.' Although the meeting had not been publicly announced for more than twenty-four hours, no less than from six to seven thousand persons entered the Crown and Anchor in the hope of being present, more than two-thirds of whom were compelled to retire as they came, under the dispiriting news that the place was crowded. The Hon. C. P. Villiers, M.P., took the chair, and in his opening speech said that the election had rendered a double service to the country. It had struck a blow at two great causes of the evil in this country, the abuse of property and the abuse of power. At the mention of Mr. Bright's name, the whole audience rose to their feet, cheering loudly and waving their hats. Dr. (afterwards Sir John) Bowring, parodying a well-known

epigram upon Dr. Goodenough, who was once called upon to preach before the House of Commons, said—and the lines were received with tumultuous applause—

‘Tis meet enough and fit enough the House should be enlightened,  
For sure enough they’re dull enough, and wanting to be *Brightened!*’

Mr. Bright made an earnest speech on the great question of the day, the repeal of the Corn Laws, and in the course of it expressed his disappointment over his first experience of the House of Commons on the previous evening. Lord John Russell opened a debate with a solemn warning to the Government; and then Sir Robert Peel got up. He looked as though he was going to attack Lord John Russell in a very effectual manner, for he seemed terribly indignant; but it was all smoke. ‘He certainly did what man could do to defend the present Government, but it would have exceeded the powers of an angel to explain to the House, or to the country, how it was that with a majority in the House of Commons of more than a hundred, with nearly all the House of Lords at its back, with a starving people before them, with decaying trade, with insurrection threatening them, more or less near, in Ireland, in Wales, in the north of England, with disease eating into the very heart’s core of the empire,—that, under all these circumstances, this long session should well-nigh have passed over, and the Government not be able to point to one single measure which could in the slightest degree ameliorate the condition of the people.’

The Parliamentary band of Free Traders—which, though small in numbers, was rapidly increasing in influence with the country—thus received a strong and valuable accession. None of those present in the House of Commons on the 28th of July 1843, and who saw the young representative for Durham appear at the table, and make the declaration prescribed by the Act for members of the Society of Friends, could for a moment imagine that the new member—canvassed though his advent had been—was destined to develop into an orator whose eloquence pales not before that of a Sheil, a Grattan, or a Canning, or before that of his own more immediate contemporary, Gladstone.

## CHAPTER IV.

*FIRST SPEECH IN PARLIAMENT—FACTORY LEGISLATION, ETC.*

The League triumph at Durham.—Mr. Bright's appearance in the House.—His Maiden Speech.—Import Duties.—An Appeal to Ministers.—The Corn Laws the real grievance of the People.—The Chelsea Out-pensioners Bill.—Commercial relations with the Brazils.—Factory Legislation.—Lord Ashley and Mr. Bright.—Defence of the Operatives.—A dramatic incident.—Distress in the Eastern Counties.—The evils of Protection.—Mr. Bright on the Game Laws.—Speech on the Maynooth Grant.



WITH every disposition to minimise the triumph which the League principles had achieved in Durham, those journals which were strongly opposed to Mr. Bright and his friends found the task impossible. Here was a candidate totally unknown in the city three months before he wrested it out of the hands of the monopolists. True, the *Morning Herald* had given utterance to a feeling of uneasiness shortly before the election when it remarked that 'the Quaker Bright has many friends in Durham.' But it seemed scarcely likely, nay, highly improbable, in the eyes of most people, that a young candidate, appearing in Durham for only the second time in his life, and contesting the representation on two such principles as purity of election and the abrogation of the Corn Laws, could win a seat hitherto regarded as the appanage of an aristocratic family, and one which was supposed to be open only to the pressure of the golden lever. Three or four days preceding the election even, the correspondent of the *Times* wrote from Durham to the effect that the seat might be regarded as safe for Mr. Purvis. He had very good grounds for believing that he would be returned by a substantial majority. The result defeated.

this and many other prognostications. Commenting on the moral of the victory, a contemporary writer observed, 'Greater than the accession to the House of Commons of an additional advocate of freedom of trade, freedom of conscience, freedom of representation, and universal peace—able, vigorous, and eloquent though he be—must be the results of John Bright's election. It has proved that a principle is much more than a name. He has achieved a victory which could not have been attained by any one even of the very *élite* of the Whig aristocracy. Lord John Russell, Lord Morpeth, Lord Howick, would have failed where the Rochdale cotton-spinner was successful.' At the same time, though the cause was good, if the advocate had been bad, the result might still have been different. The candidate must not be robbed of his share of the triumph; the electors of Durham were quite unable to resist Mr. Bright's convincing and persuasive eloquence.

But, the seat being gained, interest now centred in the new member's appearance in the House. Whatever be the cause, we suppose that no member, even the most fluent, ever yet rose for the first time in the House of Commons without confessing to a feeling of trepidation. He is conscious that he is addressing, not only one of the highest, but one of the most critical assemblies in the world. Eloquence at the bar and upon the platform is not the same thing as eloquence in the House of Commons. So, although Mr. Bright had addressed very large audiences out of doors, it was not without diffidence that he rose to make his maiden speech in Parliament, before the smallest audience he had probably ever addressed. This was on the 7th of August, during a discussion in a very thin House of Mr. Ewart's motion, 'That it is expedient that the principles and suggestions contained in the evidence taken before the Import Duties Commission of session 1840 be carried into general effect; and that the trade and industry of the country require further and more effectual relief by the removal or reduction of duties which press upon the raw material of manufacture, and on articles of interchange with foreign nations, as well as on the means of subsistence of the people.'

Mr. Bright began by expressing his reluctance to take up the

time of the House, especially so soon after he had taken his seat there, but the strong interest he felt in the question, and the duty he owed to his constituents, called upon him for the expression of his opinion. He then went on to complain that on both sides of the House there had been too much reliance upon the miserable system of protection. He avowed his own opinions, pleading for the total abolition of the Corn Law, and the adoption of the principle of perfect freedom of trade. 'Crime,' he said, 'has often veiled itself under the name of virtue, but of all the crimes against the laws of God and the true interests of man, none has ever existed more odious and more destructive than that which has assumed the amiable term of Protection.' Then he proceeded :—

'The right hon. gentleman at the head of the Government (Sir R. Peel) has acknowledged the soundness of the policy of buying in the cheapest and selling in the dearest market. The Secretary for the Home Department (Sir James Graham) says our principles are the principles of common sense; the President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Gladstone) has written and spoken Free-trade doctrines; the opinions of the noble Lord the member for North Lancashire, and Secretary for the Colonies (Lord Stanley), I should not value highly when I remember the profound ignorance on this question he manifested when last before his constituents; but of all the members of the Government, the one for whom I feel an especial affection, is the right hon. the Paymaster of the Forces (Sir E. Knatchbull). Unlike his colleague at the head of the Government, his words seem to have been given him for the purpose of expressing his ideas, and he has advanced the only tangible argument that has been uttered in this House in favour of the protection system. The House cannot, I am sure, have forgotten the argument of the right hon. baronet, that the Corn Law is necessary to enable the landowners to discharge or maintain the settlements made on the marriages of their daughters. I have, since this declaration was made, attended many large meetings of agriculturists, and I confess I have never found a single farmer who seemed to be aware that this House had ever bestowed any attention on the means of providing portions for farmers' daughters. And no labourer has ever asserted that Parliament has taken steps to enable him to give a sum of ten or twenty pounds to his daughters to provide furniture for their cottages on entering the marriage state. I protest against the injustice of a law that enriches the rich and cares nothing for the poor; and if, during the period I may have a seat in this House, I should ever directly or indirectly give any support to a system so manifestly contrary to sound policy, and so destructive of the welfare of the great body of the people, I should be ashamed to hold up my head in any assembly of my countrymen.'

It may be assumed that by this time Mr. Bright had quite lost his nervousness. Having bearded the Treasury Bench all round, he went on to remark that this question was simply one of rent;



and was rent a property more sacred than any other? To him the property in labour was a more sacred property than any right to the soil could ever be. Why was it that the past four years had been years of suffering? Because the protection given to one description of property prevented the application of another description of property to the relief of the wants of the country. Seeing the extreme discontent existing among the great body of the working classes, he put it to any gentleman enamoured of the Corn Law, What was it to which we were hastening? As regarded the Irish question, the great difficulty was how to give employment, and wages, and food to the two millions of paupers in Ireland. 'It is no petty legislation that can do this, no bringing in bills for the recovery of small debts, and making a boast of measures such as that. Landowners have been our law-makers, and yet everywhere there is suffering, and the landowners are everywhere charged with the mischief. You have been sowing curses, and you now wonder that curses have grown.'

Mr. Bright concluded his first speech with this personal appeal to Sir Robert Peel and Mr. Gladstone :—

'I am surprised at the course pursued by the right hon. baronet. I should be glad to see him, not the Minister of the Queen merely, but the Minister of the people also. I should rejoice to see him disconnect himself from the party whose principles he declares to be unsound. I should be glad to see him bearing in mind the source from which he has sprung, the source of his power and wealth, as it is the source of much of the power, and wealth, and greatness of this empire. He may have a laudable ambition—he may seek renown, but no man can be truly great who is content to serve an oligarchy who regard no interest but their own, and whose legislation proves they have no sympathy with the wants of the great body of their countrymen. I live in the manufacturing districts; I am well acquainted with the wishes and feelings of the population; and I do not hesitate to say, when I view the disregard with which they are treated by this House, that the dangers which impend are greater than those which now surround us. I can assure the right hon. the President of the Board of Trade, that his flimsy excuses will not avail him at the bar of public opinion. He knows what is right, and he refuses to do it; and whether the session be at the beginning or near its close, it is his duty to propose measures of relief to the commerce of the country. That this is not the time is an excuse which is as untrue as it is insulting. When will the time come? Will monopoly resign its hold of the subsistence of the people? "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" The Government knows what is right, the people demand it to be done; and the Ministry who refuse to act incur an awful responsibility. I have been anxious

thus briefly to express my opinions ;—I grieve that the country should be thus trifled with, and that it should have grounds for despairing of relief from this House. Nothing but danger can come from persisting in our present policy.'

The motion for which Mr. Bright spoke was lost by 52 to 25. The hon. member's address excited a good deal of interest, and it was admitted to have many telling points. One who was in the House of Commons at the time observed that 'as a speaker Mr. Bright is far superior to many who are listened to in that assembly ; but those who know the constitution of the House know also the great influence of station, name, and wealth, and how much dulness will be tolerated from one of a good family. Mr. Bright is about the middle size, rather firmly and squarely built, with a fair, clear complexion, and an intelligent and pleasing expression of countenance. His voice is good, his enunciation distinct, and his delivery free from any unpleasant peculiarity or mannerism. He is young, and has apparently a long career before him. His dress is rather more *recherché* than that of the Friends of a generation back, differing but slightly from the ordinary costume of the day.' Mr. Bright's earnestness and energy were proverbial, and it speedily became apparent that whatever might have been the case as regards the past, in the future the representation of Durham would be no dead-letter.

The Government, too, had acquired another sleepless critic—though that was an acquisition for which they were not anxious. A few days after the delivery of his maiden speech, and just before the prorogation, Mr. Bright again addressed the House, and put in a stirring if indirect plea for the Anti-Corn-Law cause. The hon. member supported a motion for the rejection of the Chelsea Out-pensioners Bill—a measure which rendered old veterans liable to be called on to serve again, or to lose the pensions which they had been awarded for long service. He began by combating the assertion of the War Secretary (Sir H. Hardinge), that a standing army was one of the greatest safeguards of constitutional freedom, and said he trusted so monstrous a doctrine would never again be uttered. He read a letter showing that the bill before the House was not regarded favourably by the pensioners. The circumstances of the

manufacturing districts were put forward as a reason for demanding the passing of this bill. But 'the question was, should they grant to the Government greater powers of repression whilst that Government refused all redress of the heavy grievances of the people.' Mr. Bright then detailed the sufferings which prevailed in the manufacturing districts, and added, 'The distress exists still; the laws which destroyed the trade of a rapidly increasing population exist still; and what do the Government now propose? To do tardy justice? To remove the restrictions? To let the people work who want to work, and would have work if the law did not prevent it? Nothing of the kind. There is no sign of repentance on the part of the Ministers: justice and relief are asked for, and the people are answered by a bill to raise a new body of military to keep the discontent of the suffering and the oppressed from becoming dangerous to hon. members opposite.' The people had assembled together, but they had assembled peaceably. After referring also to our treatment of Ireland, the hon. member in this forcible passage indicated the lessons of the past:—

'The people of the United Kingdom asked for a reform of this House—for a better representation of the people; and their prayer was for a long period despised and neglected. They asked that stumps of trees and old walls should no longer send members to this House, but that the thousands who inhabit Manchester, and Leeds, and Birmingham should have a voice in your deliberations. You refused it. It was a just demand, but there was no clamour. It was needful for the good of the people, but it was not then needful to secure you from violence. You dared to refuse it. But the usual results followed; a storm arose before which you quailed, and you were for a time swept almost from before the sight of the public. Now we have grievances; we have a law which prevents our trade—which denies the right to labour, for themselves and their families, to multitudes of honest and industrious individuals. The people ask you for nothing that is yours, but for that which is their own, and which you have taken from them for a time. The population increases, and trade does not increase with it, and therefore suffering and competition increase. . . . If monopoly be right and wise, let us have it, fully and without stint; but if Free Trade be the policy for this country, then let us have Free Trade. The question for this House to determine appears to me to be a very simple one indeed. Shall we give the people the means to live comfortably by their honest labour, or shall we afford to the Government which refuses them justice, the power to coerce them, and to render it safe to be unjust? Is this policy to go on for ever?'

Warning the Government that the middle classes would not for







W. J. M. 1874

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE EARL GRANVILLE.

Engraved by W. J. M. 1874.



ever go on supporting the aristocracy against the rights of the most numerous class, Mr. Bright said that for himself he would be no party to giving increased power to a Government which gave no evidence of a disposition to redress the wrongs they had admitted; but he would cordially support any proposition which might serve to prevent the passing of that most unnecessary and coercive bill. The Government, however, had a large majority on the measure.

Early in the session of 1844, attention was directed to the condition of our commercial relations with the Brazils, and Mr. Labouchere moved an address to Her Majesty, praying her to adopt such measures as might prove best calculated to maintain and improve those relations. Mr. Gladstone opposed the motion, on the ground of its embarrassing nature, while he admitted the great importance of our trade with the Brazils. Mr. Bright spoke upon the motion, and declared that he could only express disgust and amazement at the manner in which noble lords and hon. gentlemen spoke of the Africans in the Brazils, while entirely overlooking the famishing population in their own manufacturing counties and agricultural districts. They had already almost an open market with the Brazils, and yet our trade with that country for many years past had been diminishing. The benefit of the existing treaty had been destroyed by sacrificing the national good to class and selfish interests. As regarded the sugar supply, the West India planters derived the same advantage from that monopoly which the landed proprietors of England sought from the Corn Laws. The Government knew that this was merely a question of self-interest, and the country knew it too. But they might depend upon it there was intelligence and virtue enough in the country to put an end, not only to this, but to every other monopoly by which the people were suffering. Mr. Gladstone had evaded the real question at issue. The monopolists, whether Whigs or Tories, all hung together. They were then discussing the question of sugar, but it was the same interest, whether corn, sugar, or timber. Referring to the prevalent distress, Mr. Bright said that no state of agricultural prosperity ever yet maintained the revenue of the kingdom; and unless the Govern-



ment regarded those districts with a more favourable feeling, he could tell them that consequences would some day come, for which they would have received but a small compensation from the Corn Law or the Sugar Law. With upwards of two millions of paupers in Ireland—with a million paupers in England and Wales—and with an enormous mass of poverty in Scotland, it was astonishing that a Government which professed to feel for the sufferings of the people would aggravate, instead of seeking to alleviate, those sufferings, by still further depressing that trade which could alone afford them employment.

Lord Palmerston followed on the same side, affirming that the line of argument which Government used to justify them in refusing to let in foreign sugar, was no more than declaring that this monopoly should be everlasting. If they were to wait until they could induce the Brazilians to abolish slavery and the slave trade, no person in that House would live to see the day when foreign sugar would be admitted into the home markets of this country. There voted for Mr. Labouchere's motion, 132 ; against, 205 ; so that the Government had a majority of 73.

We shall pass over at present Mr. Bright's early speeches in the House connected directly with the Corn Laws, reserving them for another chapter, and deal here only with miscellaneous questions. Of these latter questions, one of the most important related to the hours of factory labour—a subject discussed at length and with much warmth in the session of 1844. It gave rise to considerable misunderstanding between Mr. Bright and Lord Ashley—now the Earl of Shaftesbury, a nobleman imbued with true feelings of philanthropy, though these feelings may not always have been under the control of the highest wisdom. The working classes have been largely indebted both to Mr. Bright and Lord Shaftesbury, and the difference of opinion which arose between them, culminating in more than one passage of arms, was naturally therefore viewed with regret. We turn to these debates now for the purpose of showing Mr. Bright's true position in regard to factory legislation, and of disentangling it from that which is frequently assigned to him. It is also due to him to state, as between himself and Lord Ashley, that the latter was

very largely dependent upon hearsay for many of his facts, and could not possibly be so intimately acquainted with the subject as those who had spent all their lives amongst the factory operatives, and were perfectly conversant with everything concerning them and their work.

So much by way of preliminary. Sir James Graham having brought forward in the House of Commons the Government Bill for the Regulation of Labour in Factories, Lord Ashley proposed, in committee, the following amendment to Clause 2:—‘That the word “night” shall be taken to mean from six o’clock in the evening to six o’clock in the following morning; and the word “meal-time” shall be taken to mean an interval of cessation from work for the purpose of rest and refreshment, at the rate of two hours a day, with a view to effect a limitation of the hours of labour to ten in the day.’ The noble mover dwelt upon the physical and moral evils attending the factory system, and asked ‘in behalf of the poor, a time to live and a time to die,—a time for the duties of life, and a time for its comforts.’

Mr. Bright rose during the debate and delivered a lengthy and important speech. He complained in the outset that Lord Ashley had taken a most unfair and most unjust view of the question, and one which the reports of the factory inspectors did not corroborate. This the hon. member illustrated by extracts referring to the comparatively healthy condition of the workers in factories. It was also proved in the evidence of the Factory Commission that the height of boys and girls employed in agriculture, while exceeding that of those employed in mines, showed no sensible difference from that of those employed in mills. There was hardly a complaint made by Lord Ashley against the manufacturing towns of the North which might not be equally well alleged against London or Birmingham. He cited cases to prove that the labour of the London milliners and dress-makers, during the season, was much worse than the severest toil in any of the factories. Besides prolonged hours, there was also such a thing as starving to death. Let not the House suppose that if they passed the clause before them they would do more than plaster over the sores which their own most unjust legislation had created, instead

of endeavouring to renovate the constitution and going to the root of the disease, which was well known to the Queen's ministers and hon. members. Mr. Bright further denied the truth of the terrible picture of the loss of limbs and of life in the factories. Amongst the cases adduced to prove this was that of Mr. Samuel Ashton, a large manufacturer and employer of labour. From 1819 to 1830 he employed 400 hands; from 1830 to 1835, 900 hands; from 1835 to 1844, 1200 hands; and yet amongst all these no fatal accident had occurred during the whole of the period. Cases of accident taken into the infirmaries were frequently described as happening to factory hands when it was not so. There were far more fatal accidents amongst carters than from all the factories of the United Kingdom. It was merely trifling with legislation to establish a public prosecutor as was intended by this bill. As to alleged cruelties, the Factory Commissioners in their Report stated that to the charge of cruelty brought against millowners, they could give the most decided and unqualified denial. The high rate of wages amongst the operatives, rendered them independent and able to resist aggression. The Report further stated that 'as to the immorality said to be engendered by the factory system, the whole current of testimony goes to show that the charges made against cotton factories on this head are calumnies.'

Mr. Bright then contrasted the condition of the operatives with that of the agricultural labourers, greatly to the disadvantage of the latter. In schools, places of worship, means of education, wages, and general prosperity, the manufacturing classes were far ahead of the agricultural. Touching on the question of popular literature, the hon. member said he had a note from Mr. W. Chambers, of Edinburgh, stating that of eighty-five thousand copies of their *Chambers' Journal* sold weekly, not less than four-fifths were disposed of in the manufacturing districts. Lanarkshire and Lancashire afforded the greatest number of readers, the latter county alone taking more than twenty thousand copies, while to Dorsetshire (which was Lord Ashley's own county) probably not fifty copies were sent. Yet he (Mr. Bright) did not deny the sufferings and the wrongs of the manufacturing population. What he contended was,

that as respects the remuneration for labour, the state of society, and the general comfort of the population, the cotton districts might stand a comparison with any other in the kingdom. He replied to the statement that a large proportion of the females employed in mills were married, by producing statistics which proved the very reverse. He then contrasted the rarity of parochial relief amongst the operatives with its frequency in the county which the noble lord represented. He also cited the case of a labourer who came from Suffolk, where he and his family of ten had been only able to get 1s. 2d. per head per week, whereas when he became employed in Lancashire their earnings rose to 5s. per head. But notwithstanding all the facts he had cited, Mr. Bright admitted that there were evils, serious evils, and much distress in the manufacturing districts. But 'hitherto manufacturers have had no fair chance: you have interfered with their natural progress, you have crippled them by your restrictions, you have at times almost destroyed them by monopolies, you have made them the sources of your public revenue, and the upholders of your rents, but at your hands they have never to this moment received justice and fair dealing.' In announcing that he should vote against Lord Ashley's proposition because it was impracticable, and because under the present oppressive legislation it would make all past injustice only more intolerable, the speaker further said: 'The people ask for freedom for their industry, for the removal of the shackles on their trade; you deny it to them, and then forbid them to labour, as if working less would give them more food, whilst your monopoly laws make food scarce and dear. Give them liberty to work, give them the market of the world for their produce, give them the power to live comfortably, and increasing means and increasing intelligence will speedily render them independent enough and wise enough to bring the duration of labour to that point at which life shall be passed with less of irksome toil of every kind, and more of recreation and enjoyment.'

Mr. Bright's speech had a dramatic and personal conclusion. He was compelled to make an *exposé* of the sources from whence Lord Ashley had drawn his information, in order to show how

utterly untrustworthy that information was. He therefore told the noble lord that he had been grossly imposed upon, and that he would never obtain credit for his statements unless he could obtain them from more honest characters than those he had hitherto employed. One of these individuals had published many statements respecting the manufactories in the North, some of which were wholly false, and most of which were grossly and malignantly exaggerated. 'I have in my hand,' said Mr. Bright, 'two of these publications. One is *The Adventures of William Dodd, the Factory Cripple*, and the other is entitled *The Factory System*, and consists of letters addressed to the noble lord. Both books have gone forth under the sanction of the noble lord. Dodd states that from the hardships he endured in a factory he was "done up" at the age of thirty-two, whereas I can prove he was treated with uniform kindness, which he repaid by gross immorality of conduct, and for which he was at length discharged from his employment. I have in my possession letters written by this individual, in which he states that the noble lord and his party had used him, as long as they could get anything out of him. He said also that the noble lord had given him dinners at his own house, and that when he applied for a small balance due to him, the noble lord had written him an angry letter, recounting the dinners he had eaten at his table. He also stated that the noble lord had shown him to his visitors as a cripple, and as a specimen of what the factories were doing for the population employed in them. I do not wish to dwell upon this point, but I am free to tell the noble lord that unless he employs agents more respectable, his statements and his expressions of benevolence will ever be viewed with suspicion by the manufacturers of the North; and I may add that others who are thus employed are not a whit more creditable than Dodd.'

These revelations naturally caused considerable sensation in the House, and when Mr. Bright sat down, Lord Ashley sprang up to defend himself. The following is an accurate account of what occurred :—

*Lord Ashley.* 'I think the House will feel that in some measure I have a right to make one or two observations on the remarkable speech of the hon. gentleman : I

will thank the hon. gentleman to explain that charge against me which he has insinuated, and which he said he would not pursue. I will not allow it to pass. I therefore throw myself on the indulgence and the protection of this House; and I do request all hon. gentlemen present to exert their influence, as members of this House and as gentlemen, to make the hon. member for Durham pursue his charge and state his case.'

*Mr. Bright.* 'What is the charge the noble lord alludes to? I told the noble lord that the instruments he carried on his operations with were not worthy of his cause or of him. I am prepared to maintain that assertion. I make no charge against the noble lord. I tell him that I think he is much misled by these men. I am prepared to prove that those agents of the noble lord are of a character that I would not take their evidence with respect to agricultural matters; and I think it is not fair that it should be taken with respect to manufacturing matters. If the noble lord wishes to have information respecting manufacturing affairs, nineteen out of twenty—nay, all the respectable manufacturers in Lancashire, would be willing to give it him.'

*Lord Ashley.* 'What, no charge? No "unpaid balance," I suppose! No "cripple paraded for exhibition!" Well, if the hon. member says he has made no charge, and if before the assembled Commons of England he is prepared to assert that he made no charge against me, I can assure him with satisfaction that the matter may there rest. But those who heard the hon. gentleman's statement can best judge whether a charge were made; and those who hear me can best judge whether the hon. member had the courage to maintain it.'

*Mr. Bright.* 'The noble lord is entirely mistaken. I say the noble lord is entirely mistaken if he supposes that I judge of his character by the character of the men in whom I tell him to put no trust. I tell the noble lord plainly that I have letters in my hand which will prove all that I have stated. I will hand them to the noble lord with pleasure. I will go further, and tell the noble lord that the individual who wrote the letters I hold in my hand offered, for a sum of money, to sell a friend of mine a large number of other letters, which that friend of mine was, as I think, too fastidious to lay hold of. I tell the noble lord not to trust these men. I have always thought that the noble lord was honest in his convictions; I have always said so, both in public and in private; but I repeat that the instruments that he has worked with are not worthy of him or of his cause.'

Extracts read from the letters fully corroborated all that Mr. Bright had said, but he again repeated that he had a high respect for the character of Lord Ashley, who in this case had been entirely misled. His lordship accepted Mr. Bright's explanation, and admitted that he had been deceived in the character of his informant Dodd. With this the exciting incident closed.

But Lord Ashley's statements generally in his opening speech had 'vanished into air, into thin air,' under the examination of the hon. member for Durham. It was commonly felt that they had

been greatly exaggerated, though the fault lay with others, and not with the noble lord. A word more remains to be said upon this question of factory legislation. Lord Ashley's motion was carried by 179 to 170; and the amendment came on at a later stage in a more substantive form. He now moved to substitute 'ten' for 'twelve' as the hours of labour, but was defeated on this occasion by a majority of seven, in a House composed of nearly four hundred members. Sir James Graham withdrew the bill, and introduced another in its stead. A prolonged discussion took place on the third reading, when Lord Ashley again proposed to limit the hours of labour. During the discussion Mr. Bright replied to the noble lord's second speech, pointing out its inaccuracies and gross exaggerations, as on the first occasion. The manufacturers, he said, desired that the House, instead of passing a measure which would tend to restrict their market and diminish wages, should give to their workmen the means of obtaining sugar, bread, and other necessities at a lower rate. Lord Ashley's motion was rejected by 297 to 159; and amongst those who voted against it were Mr. Corry, Sir T. E. Colebrooke, Mr. Bright, Mr. J. Evelyn Denison, Mr. Milner Gibson, Mr. Gladstone, Sir James Graham, Sir W. Heathcote, Mr. Sidney Herbert, Sir Robert Peel, and Mr. Roebuck.

This question has been much misrepresented, and Mr. Bright indicated what he considered to be the true remedy when he demanded Free Trade. In that was to be found the secret of cheaper food, higher wages, and fewer hours of labour.

Towards the close of the session much excitement was caused by a great number of incendiary fires which took place in the Eastern Counties, where terrible distress was prevalent. Mr. Milner Gibson brought the matter under the attention of the House of Commons, and moved an address to Her Majesty representing that there was reason to believe the incendiarism which had for some time prevailed in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and Cambridgeshire was caused by deep discontent among the labouring population of those counties, and praying Her Majesty to issue a Commission to inquire into the condition of the agricultural labourers in those counties, and to ascertain what were the grievances from which they suffered. Sir J. Graham,

speaking for the Government, gave the motion his most decided opposition, affirming that Mr. Gibson's speech and the success of his motion would have the effect of swelling the outrages which all deplored.

Mr. Bright delivered a very animated speech in support of the motion. Ever since he had taken his seat in that House, he said, there had been a very strong disinclination to inquire into anything connected with the agriculture of the country. He attributed this to fear lest there should be revelations made against the Corn Laws. Why should we be kept in total ignorance about the produce of the soil? The Government would not issue an inquiry into these fires, although if one fire a month, and not 250 in nine months, had occurred in the manufacturing districts, there would have been loud condemnation of the conduct of the manufacturers towards those they employed. But the *Times* and the *Chronicle* had not forgotten their office, and their commissioners showed that security to property was not compatible with the terrible distress that existed among the labouring population of the Eastern Counties. The Poor Law was a harsh measure, but a man had other evils of no light character before he felt this. 'He must be a miserable legislator indeed who fancies that the Poor Law could secure permanent comfort to the people. The great and all-present evil of the rural districts is this,—you have too many people for the work to be done, and you, the landed proprietors, are alone responsible for this state of things; and, to speak honestly, I believe many of you know it.' Tenants and labourers in Suffolk and other counties were being devoured by excessive competition, whilst the magnanimous landlords sheltered themselves from all competition by the Corn Law which they themselves had passed, and made the competition of all other classes serve to swell still more their rentals. It was for this object the Corn Law was passed, and yet in the face of their countrymen they dared to call it a law for the protection of native industry. Mr. Bright adduced statistics in proof of this. If the League could not force a settlement of this question, the increase of population would. The landlords disregarded all rights but their own. The tenantry were greatly oppressed, too, by the preservation of game. How



many lives had been sacrificed during the past year to the childish infatuation of preserving game? After depicting the misery of the agricultural labourer, the hon. member said, 'I will tell you what your boasted protection is,—it is a protection of native idleness at the expense of the impoverishment of native industry.' He threw back with scorn the imputation that he and his friends desired to produce discord in the rural districts, though that had been attempted for long in the north of England. As 'protection to native industry' had placed the agricultural labourers in hovels, gaols, and union-houses, he recommended them to try another policy—a little fair dealing, a little common humanity, a little common sense. 'Here you sit,' said Mr. Bright, speaking with great energy, 'representatives of the people, legislators of this great commercial empire, making laws for your own exclusive gain, and denying the most natural and incontestable right of all men, the right to live by their industry, to the great mass of those for whom you profess to legislate. You, the magnanimous aristocracy of Britain, you own the soil, you boast of ancestry, you amuse yourselves with much painting on the panels of your coaches—and yet you make laws in this House to enrich your own class at the expense of millions, to whom you deny all political power, and to whom you give no protection whatever. For all this you must one day answer, and the worst I wish you is that, when the time of retribution shall come upon the landed proprietors, it may please Heaven to visit them with more of mercy than they have ever shown to the poor of this country.'

The House was not yet prepared to listen to appeals respecting the Corn Laws, or to stir in the agricultural question at all, and Mr. Gibson's motion was defeated by 130 votes to 41.

Early in the ensuing session—27th of February—Mr. Bright moved for the appointment of a Select Committee to inquire into the operation of the Game Laws. In doing so, he enlarged upon the enormous number of offences, conflicts, and outrages which resulted from these laws, and recounted the previous committees which had sat on this question. Besides the great injury inflicted upon farmers generally by the preservation of game, it was notorious that the destruction of grain by game throughout the country was

enormous, and far beyond that usually supposed. Even the fear of free trade which prevailed amongst farmers would be mitigated if they knew that game preserving was at the same time to come to an end. Mr. Bright brought forward many cases to show the cruel hardship and injustice to which the Game Laws gave rise. The punishments inflicted upon the poor for offences against these laws were, he insisted, monstrous, when compared with the offences; and the infliction of such punishments destroyed all reverence for the law, and all belief in the impartiality, the wisdom, and the mercy of the Legislature. He could not understand how any man could set his enjoyments and amusements, though abstractedly innocent, in comparison with the great and grievous evils afflicting the country as the result of these laws. 'He could state, with the utmost sincerity, that there was not in his own breast a particle of feeling of hostility towards any human being in connection with this question; but he had seen the sufferings of thousands of the poor and defenceless—of those for whom the law should be a protector—those for whose special good the Parliament and the constitution had been instituted; and he had seen other cases where persons had had their lives sacrificed under this system. He had seen cases where persons had been led out to undergo the awful sentence of the law, whilst the public sympathy was decidedly in their favour; and under these circumstances he did think that the House would not be doing justice to those over whom they were called to govern, if they did in any way give encouragement to a system productive of so many grievous evils, not to one class, but to many classes; and not to one district, but to the whole kingdom.'

Sir James Graham, on the part of the Government, consented to the appointment of a committee, the members of which were eventually nominated.

About a month after his exhaustive and impressive speech in the House, Mr. Bright spoke upon the same subject at St. Alban's, in Hertfordshire. It appears that a public dinner was given to a well-known farmer, Mr. Horncastle, as a testimony of the approbation felt by his brother farmers for his courage in exposing the

grievances of the Game Laws. Mr. Bright received an invitation to the dinner, and was called upon to speak. After bearing witness to the spirited manner in which Mr. Horncastle had come forward for the purpose of saying what was known to be the opinion of nineteen out of every twenty farmers in the kingdom, Mr. Bright said that it was only fitting such men should be honoured. He had heard it said that there was no spirit amongst farmers; but he had never believed that; it was only slumbering. Referring next to the conditions under which farmers took their land, the speaker asked, 'Is it not notorious that in every county of Great Britain there is, and has been for years past, a competition for land so fierce that nearly all the bargain is in the hands of the landlord? The effect of this competition is to bid up rent to the very highest point at which it can be hoped to be paid, and to bear down every covenant and right which, under other circumstances, the farmer might reasonably expect to be granted to him for the preservation of his interests.' The farmer gave all his best energies and labour, and yet he was ruined by a system which did no good to any human being whatsoever—the system of game-preserving.

Mr. Bright observed that in moving for a committee in the House of Commons on this subject, he had brought forward cases which had been laughed at in that assembly; and yet he could produce a tenant to show that for a number of years he had expended £1000 annually in the purchase of artificial manure, but so completely was his farm ravaged by game, that he found it useless to toil and sacrifice his capital and to farm in this manner, and he therefore discontinued this large purchase of artificial manure, and thus to a very great extent diminished the employment of labourers, and consequently lessened their chance of a fair remuneration in the parish in which that farm was situate. By this system the landlords were made the greatest enemies of a class in whose real well-being they had the truest and greatest interest. There were capitalists in the country who had had so small a return upon their labour and capital as the farmers. He knew more about this question than many of the landlords, and the House of Commons would have been infinitely worse than its greatest calumniator or enemy had

ever dared to brand it, had it refused the investigation which he demanded upon the cases he was then able to submit to it. The committee had been chosen fairly, and what they wanted now were specific and accurate statements of damage, and opinions from competent authorities. Upon this question of game-preserving, ninety-nine farmers out of every hundred were entirely agreed. 'Let us have from every county where game-preserving has been carried to any serious extent, a body of witnesses who shall for ever settle the question as respects the particular county. It is not sufficient that I should prove that game-preserving has done alarming mischief in Suffolk or in Wiltshire, for to prove that there is a local malady would not perhaps justify Parliament in applying that which may be termed a general remedy; but what I want is to bring out as much as possible the truth from every county where this nuisance has been oppressive.'

Mr. Bright next exhorted the tenant farmers themselves to look after their interests, and there was no reason why they should not send their own representatives to Parliament. He hoped that a new era was beginning to dawn. When that era came, the cultivators of the soil—the honourable, ancient, numerous, and most necessary of all classes of the community—would no longer be made the shuttlecock of political parties, but be treated as rational men, and their interests considered in a rational manner.

Another subject which excited great public interest came up in the House of Commons in the session of 1845, viz., the question of the Maynooth grant. On the 3d of April, Sir Robert Peel proposed a resolution for the improvement of Maynooth College, fixing the grant at £26,000 per annum. It was held by some that the measure would justify the endowment of the Roman Catholic priesthood, and this Lord John Russell described as a larger, more liberal, and more statesmanlike measure. The grant was objected to by others on theological grounds, while a third party saw in it a step towards endowing another Church Establishment in Ireland. The resolution was agreed to by 216 votes to 114, and the bill was brought in and read a first time. On the second reading, the most protracted debate of the session ensued, lasting through six nights.

Mr. Bright opposed the bill, on the ground that an institution purely ecclesiastical was to be paid for out of the public taxes. His attitude was intelligible enough, being that of one opposed to State endowments of religion altogether. He was anxious, however, to make an explanation with regard to the principle on which he should give his vote; and as the matter was one of very great importance, we shall give the chief points of his speech. He held that there was no argument used in defence of the measure which would not be just as valid for the defence of further measures, not for payment of the Catholic priests of Maynooth only, but for the payment of all the priests in Ireland or in England. If the principle were conceded now, ten or twenty years hence some Prime Minister might stand up and state that in 1795 the principle was conceded, and that in 1845 that concession—or rather, that principle—was again sanctioned; and then, arguing from the two cases, it would be easy to demonstrate that it was no violation of principle whatever to establish a new Church in Ireland, and add thereby to the monstrous evils which exist there now from the establishment of one in connection with the State.

Mr. Bright continued: 'The object of this measure was just as objectionable to me when I learned that it was intended by this vote to soothe the discontent which exists in Ireland. I will look at the causes whence this discontent arises. Does it arise because the priests of Maynooth are now insufficiently clad or fed? I have always thought that it arose from the fact that one-third of the people are paupers—that almost all of them are not in regular employment at the very lowest rate of wages—and that the state of things amongst the bulk of the population is most disastrous, and to be deplored; but I cannot for the life of me conceive how the grant of additional money to Maynooth is to give additional employment, or food, or clothing to the people of Ireland, or make them more satisfied with their condition.' It was a sop given to the priests—hush-money, that they might not proclaim to the whole country, to Europe, and to the world, the sufferings of the population to whom they administered the rites and the consolations of religion. He asserted that the Protestant Church of Ireland was at the root of the

evils of that country. The Irish Catholics would rather see that foul blot wiped out than receive collateral endowment. There was Protestant ascendancy through everything in Ireland. The object now was to tame the priests of Ireland so that they should not tell of the wrongs of the people.

Observing that he was altogether against this system—for any purpose, under any circumstances, and at any time whatever,—Mr. Bright said that the experience of State Churches was not of a character to warrant the House in going further in the direction of endowment. The Established Churches in England and Scotland had done little good and much evil. There were some Wesleyan Nonconformists who accepted the principle of endowment, and did not seem to value the great principles for which their forefathers struggled and suffered. For himself, he should oppose the bill at every stage, simply on the ground that endowment was most unjust and injurious to the country. In conclusion, the hon. member said—

‘When I look back to the history of this country, and consider its present condition, I must say that all that the people possess of liberty has come, not through the portals of the cathedrals and the parish churches, but from the conventicles, which are despised by hon. gentlemen opposite. When I know that if a good measure is to be carried in this House, it must be by men who are sent hither by the Nonconformists of Great Britain,—when I read and see that the past and present State alliance with religion is hostile to religious liberty, preventing all growth and nearly destroying all vitality in religion itself,—then I shall hold myself to have read, thought, and lived in vain, if I vote for a measure which in the smallest degree shall give any further power or life to the principle of State endowment; and, in conclusion, I will only exhort the Dissenters of England to act in the same way, and to stand upon their own great, pure, and unassailable principle; for if they stand by it manfully, and work for it vigorously, the time may come—nay, it will come—when that principle will be adopted by the Legislature of the country.’

The second reading was carried by 323 votes to 176. The division list was a curious one. In the majority were Mr. Bright's intimate friends, Mr. Cobden, Mr. Milner Gibson, and Mr. Villiers, with Lord John Russell, Lord Palmerston, and other Liberals, and Mr. Gladstone, Sir Robert Peel, and many fellow-Conservatives. Mr. Bright was in equally strange company in the minority, which

included immovable Conservatives of the Newdegate type, though there were also with him staunch Liberals and Nonconformists. One of the minority tellers was none other than Lord Ashley, Mr. Bright's opponent of the year before in another field.

Another division took place on the order for going into committee, and a further one on the motion for bringing up the report, but the Government had large majorities; and the third reading of the bill was carried by 317 to 184 votes. Even on the question that the bill do pass, it was once more contested, and a division taken. The measure subsequently passed through the House of Lords, after great debate, and became law.

It is worthy of note that during the whole period in which Mr. Cobden and Mr. Bright were in the House of Commons together, there were only two occasions on which they were found in different division lobbies. One of these we have referred to above, and the other was in the division which took place in connection with the expenditure over the South Kensington scheme. The project was one in which the Prince Consort took a deep interest, and Mr. Cobden, having been one of the Commissioners for the Great Exhibition, and associated with the Prince, did not wish to separate himself from him in this matter.

## CHAPTER V.

*THE BATTLE OF THE LEAGUE.*

The. Corn Law Monopoly.—Manchester after the Reform Bill.—First movements for Repeal.—Cobden's Letters and Pamphlets.—Anti-Corn Law Association formed in 1836.—The Corn Law question in 1837-8.—Formation of the League.—Mr. Bright on the Provisional Committee.—Mr. Paulton's Addresses.—The Manchester Chamber of Commerce petitions against the Corn Laws.—Meetings in 1839.—Mr. Bright's early appearances.—The movement in Manchester.—In Parliament.—The League and the Press.—The Elections of 1841.—Cobden in the House of Commons.—Lamentable Condition of the Country.



WE shall now briefly trace the course of that movement which, beginning in very humble guise, and subject in its early stages to the ridicule and contempt of the supporters of Protection, at last became so influential that it wrung from Parliament legislation destructive of a great and powerful monopoly. Of all acts of the Legislature of equal magnitude, the wisdom of that which abolished the Corn Laws has been the least seriously challenged.

Early in the century, and as one result of the war with France, the working classes of England suffered great privations. Taxation was abnormally heavy, and food exceedingly dear. In the year 1801 wheat stood at 115s. 11d. per quarter, and for the following seventeen years it averaged 84s. On the overthrow of Napoleon, and the declaration of peace, the ports were once more thrown open. The agricultural classes, however, now became alarmed, and appealed to Parliament for protection. The result was that in 1815 Parliament—composed chiefly of landlords—passed the Corn Law, an Act which prohibited the importation of wheat, except under an enormous duty, until the price of home-grown reached 80s. per quarter. The.



consequence of this legislation was to raise the price of food to almost as high a figure as it had before attained. In 1816 corn reached 103s. 7d. per quarter; and in 1817, 112s. 8d. Great discontent was caused throughout the country, and riots occurred in many places. The oppressive impost was further aggravated by heavy Customs and Excise duties, which were especially and severely felt in Lancashire; and in 1820 the Manchester Chamber of Commerce was established, with the object of discussing the grievances of the trading classes in that city, and appealing to Parliament for relief.

The effects of the Corn Law monopoly were thus periodically but painfully felt from the second decade of the nineteenth century; but those who desired to see beneficial changes effected in this as well as in other directions felt that the matter was hopeless, unless the necessary preliminary step could be first obtained of a reform of the House of Commons. With this accomplished, religious, social, and other reforms might be expected to follow. All energies were therefore bent towards securing a large measure of Reform, the result being the great Act of 1832. Manchester having now become enfranchised, that city, from the great number of anti-Protectionists in her midst, began to take the lead in the opposition to the Corn Laws. At the first general election consequent on the passing of the Reform Bill, there came forward as candidates Mr. William Cobbett, Mr. Mark Philips, Mr. J. Thomas Hope, and Mr. Samuel Jones Loyd. Mr. Hope was a Conservative, and Mr. Jones Loyd a Whig. Of the other candidates, Mr. Cobbett, in his addresses, made no allusion to the great question which had then begun to attract attention; but Mr. Mark Philips, who was an advocate of short Parliaments and the Ballot, further declared himself an enemy to all restrictions and monopolies, which, depriving alike the capitalist of his remuneration and the labourer of his wages, impeded the natural progress and prosperity of trade. It would be the duty of a reformed Parliament, he said, to abolish the East India, the Bank, and the timber monopolies, and that greatest of all monopolies which was upheld by the Corn Laws. Mr. Philips was, in short, a progressive reformer on almost all points. As Cobbett

was distasteful to the great bulk of the Liberals on account of his silence upon the corn monopoly, and as he had also offended the slavery abolitionists of Manchester, it was seen that Loyd must be returned with Philips, unless a second Liberal candidate were brought forward. This was immediately done by the Free-traders, the candidate selected to run in conjunction with Mr. Philips being the Right Hon. C. Poulett Thomson, Vice-President of the Board of Trade, an able and energetic reformer. Philips and Thomson were elected, the former by a large and the latter by a considerable majority. In some other Lancashire towns the efforts made to return progressists were not so successful. The elections generally gave a great majority for Ministers, but it was difficult to tell who were real reformers and who were not; and it was therefore resolved to strengthen the hands of the Government against the landowners by petitions for the repeal of the Corn Laws. Other practical reforms were also demanded.

Ministers, however, declared that it would embarrass them to have these questions at once brought to the front for settlement, and many reformers became reconciled to this view. But on the 17th of May 1833, an effort was made, notwithstanding, to enlist the support of Parliament against the Corn Laws, when Mr. Whitmore moved that, instead of producing equality of prices, and thereby a permanent good, they had produced a contrary effect, and tended injuriously to cramp trade. Lord Althorp, Chancellor of the Exchequer, deprecated agitating the question at that moment, when they would not have an opportunity of setting it at rest, owing to the quantity of other business before Parliament. The Ministerial plea was accepted, and the matter was shelved for that session. The 'not-the-time' plea has always been a favourite and potent argument with statesmen when they have desired to stave off legislation upon some pressing question. But the people were not allowed to slumber over the subject of the Corn Laws. Amongst the energetic denouncers of these laws was Mr. Archibald Prentice, proprietor and editor of the *Manchester Times*, who wrote, 'There ought to be a systematic opposition to the continuance of the bread tax. Let half a dozen persons in each of the surrounding towns'

meet together, and resolve to agitate the question in public meetings. The matter only needs a beginning.' Manchester did indeed say something on the topic, by a public meeting held early in 1834, attended by several members of Parliament and other influential gentlemen. A committee was formed for the purpose of considering how the cause of Corn Law repeal might best be forwarded, but at that time nothing could be done. The people had scarcely as yet begun to be educated on this question.

In the House of Commons a motion was brought forward for a committee, with a view of substituting a fixed duty on corn in lieu of the fluctuating scale. The landowners were at once up in arms. Mr. Feargus O'Connor said the ruin of Ireland would follow the admission of corn duty free; but Mr. Poulett Thomson (though unsupported by his colleagues) took a larger and prophetic view of the subject when he said, 'Let them wait until one of those fluctuations should, under Providence, occur, through a failure of the harvest in France, and then a change of the Corn Laws would be called for in much less respectful language than he should ever wish to hear addressed to that House.' Mr. Hume's motion, however, was negatived by 313 to 155 votes. Ebenezer Elliott, the Corn Law Rhymer, in a stirring address to the people of England, called upon the masses to repudiate at once and for ever the idea of a fixed duty, which he described as 'graduated iniquity.' He strongly advocated a union of all the great towns. 'Put not in the banns for a new marriage of reptile-spawning fraud and time; but with the word Restitution, pronounced in thunder, startle your oppressors from their hideous dream of injustice and ruin made permanent.' As trade was tolerably good, and the pinch of poverty was not felt, this appeal, and others like it, failed to have any appreciable effect. Towards the end of the year 1834 the Whig Ministry was dismissed, and Sir Robert Peel installed as Premier. But early in the following year the Whigs once more returned to office, and the Corn Law repealers saw their cause pushed still further back by the plentiful supply of corn there was in the country, which led to a demand from the agricultural members for an increased protection rather than no protection at all.

The year 1835 also witnessed an abundant harvest; and with wheat at four shillings and sixpence a bushel, there was little desire to agitate for the repeal of an unjust law—a law which operated with terribly injurious force in periods of deficient harvests. At this time, Mr. Prentice printed in the columns of the *Manchester Times* several well-written letters from an unknown correspondent. From these letters he concluded that there was a new man rising up, who, if he held a station that would enable him to take a part in public affairs, would exert a widely beneficial influence amongst the people. Shortly afterwards a pamphlet was published entitled *England, Ireland, and America*. A copy was sent to Mr. Prentice, ‘from the author,’ and the handwriting showed it to be by his anonymous correspondent. It was further revealed that the writer was Richard Cobden. The meeting of the two men is thus described by the historian of the League: ‘I found a man who could enlighten by his knowledge, counsel by his prudence, and conciliate by his temper and manners; and who, if he found his way into the House of Commons would secure its respectful attention; but I had been an actor amongst men who, from 1812 to 1832, had fought in the rough battle for Parliamentary Reform, and I missed, in the unassuming gentleman before me, not the energy, but the apparent hardihood and dash which I had, forgetting the change of times, believed to be requisites to the success of a popular leader. In after-years, and when—having attained great platform popularity—he had been elected a member of Parliament, and when men sneered and said he would soon find his level there, as other mob orators had done, I ventured to say that he would be in his proper vocation there, and that his level would be amongst the first men in the House.’\* In his pamphlet, Cobden strongly advocated the doctrine of Free Trade and non-intervention in the affairs of other States. The *brochure* was circulated by tens of thousands. Amongst other forcible means employed for rousing public opinion

\* *History of the Anti-Corn-Law League*. By Archibald Prentice, one of its Executive Council, author of ‘Historical Sketches of Manchester,’ &c. To this work, and to the *League* newspaper, I have frequently recurred in the preparation of the ensuing sketch of the Free Trade movement.

on the question, were Colonel Thompson's *Catechism on the Corn Law*, Cobden's *Russophobia*, and numerous articles in the *Westminster Review*, and various other periodicals and newspapers.

At length, in 1837, the time was ripe for systematic effort, an impetus having been furnished by a rise in the price of corn, the unsatisfactory condition of the money market, and the failure of certain banks. Accordingly, an Anti-Corn-Law Association was formed in London, and on the Committee were the following members of Parliament: Messrs. Joseph Brotherton, J. Silk Buckingham, J. Blackburne, W. Clay, P. Chalmers, T. S. Duncombe, H. Elphinstone, W. Ewart, George Grote, D. W. Harvey, B. Hawes, Joseph Hume, J. T. Leader, Sir W. Molesworth, J. Pattison, R. Potter, J. A. Roebuck, J. Scholefield, Col. Thompson, C. A. Talk, T. Wakley, and R. Wallace. Amongst other members of the Committee were Mr. John Marshall, Mr. Archibald Prentice, Mr. Laman Blanchard, Mr. William Tait, and the three popular writers and poets, Thomas Campbell, Ebenezer Elliott, and William Howitt. In the following March, Mr. Clay moved in the House of Commons the adoption of a fixed duty of ten shillings a quarter on wheat. There voted for the motion 89, and against 223; but in the minority were no fewer than ten members connected with the Government.

On the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837, a general election took place, and notwithstanding the waning popularity of the Melbourne Ministry, they were supported by a majority in the country, not because they approved the policy of the Whigs, so much as to exclude the Tories from office. Manchester again elected Thomson and Philips; and Salford, Wigan, and Oldham followed its example in returning reformers. The total number of votes in some fifty boroughs, which returned between seventy and eighty Protectionists, did not exceed the vote of Manchester alone. Thirty-eight members strongly favourable to progressive measures were returned by London, Westminster, Marylebone, Nottingham, Leeds, Sheffield, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, and other places, representing about five millions of the population. Mr. Cobden declared that with the ballot these numbers would have been greatly increased. In the session of 1838 several efforts were made in the

House of Commons to procure a modification of the Corn Laws; but the large majorities against this showed that the House was little inclined to be disturbed in the matter, and the conviction began to force itself upon the Free-traders that outward pressure must be had recourse to. At the beginning of July, Earl Fitzwilliam presented a petition to the House of Lords from Glasgow, praying for the repeal of the Corn Law, and supporting its prayer. During the debate, Lord Melbourne significantly said that the Government would not take a decided part till it was certain the majority of the people were in favour of a change. This declaration virtually indicated the policy of the Free-traders. By the end of August the average price of wheat had risen to 77s., or about double the price which ruled at the close of the harvest of 1835. Mr. Joseph Sturge, Colonel Thompson, and others now urged instant action.

The League was formed about this time, in the following manner. A Dr. Birnie having announced a lecture on the Corn Laws in the Bolton Theatre towards the close of July 1838, a good audience assembled, and the lecturer was well received. He appears, however, to have acquitted himself so indifferently in his task, that Mr. Thomas Thomasson, turning to a young medical student named A. W. Paulton, said, 'Do, Paulton, get on the stage and say something, and don't let such a meeting be lost.' Paulton went round to the stage, and asked the people to hear him for a few moments. He spoke very acceptably for about twenty minutes, and it was ultimately arranged that he should deliver a lecture in the theatre on the 6th of August. On that night, to a crowded audience, Paulton dealt with the question in a full and able manner, and one which deeply enlisted the feelings of the audience. At Manchester the question was still further discussed in a meeting hastily called to welcome Dr. Bowring, who was on his way to Blackburn. At this meeting, Mr. James Howie proposed that the company then present should at once form themselves into an Anti-Corn-Law Association. The proposition was well received, and those favourable to it were requested to meet again on the following Monday evening. M. Frederic Bastiat, in his work upon Cobden and the League, observes: 'Seven men united themselves at Manchester

in the month of October 1838; and with that manly determination which characterises the Anglo-Saxon race, they resolved to overturn every monopoly by legal means, and accomplish without disturbance, without effusion of blood, with the power only of opinion, a revolution as profound, perhaps more profound, than that which our fathers worked to effect in 1789.' These seven men, who were present at the first meeting of the Anti-Corn-Law Association at the York Hotel, Manchester, on the 24th of September 1838, were the following: Edward Baxter, W. A. Cunningham, Andrew Dalziel, James Howie, James Leslie, Archibald Prentice, and Philip Thomson. From their names it would seem that all these earnest men were Scotchmen. To give the League a popular foundation, and to include all classes, it was resolved that the subscription should be only five shillings.

On the 13th of October, a Provisional Committee was advertised, which included the following names: Messrs. Elkanah Armitage, John Bright, W. R. Callender, George Hadfield, Alex. Henry, Thomas Potter, Absalom Watkin, and George Wilson, with John Benjamin Smith as treasurer. The week afterwards there were added to the committee, in addition to many others, Messrs. Ashworth, Cobden, John Edward Taylor, and Samuel Watts. The members of the Provisional Committee were liberal subscribers towards the expenses of the movement in its earlier stages; and it appears that at a later period, when a call was made for a £250,000 League Fund, these same gentlemen alone subscribed a total sum of £10,600.

At the first lecture delivered by Mr. Paulton on behalf of the Association in the Corn Exchange, it was stated that the organisation was established on the same righteous principle as the Anti-Slavery Society. The object of that society was to obtain the free right for the negroes to possess their own flesh and blood; the object of the new society was to obtain the free right of the people to exchange their labour for as much food as could be got for it; that the people might no longer be obliged by law to buy their food at one shop, and that the dearest in the world, but be at liberty to go to that in which it could be obtained cheapest. Mr. Paulton's

address was received with great enthusiasm. In a second lecture, he demonstrated the utter inadequacy of the sliding scale as a means of supplying food to the labouring man, denounced the injustice of the law and the legislative inventors of it, and concluded by quoting these lines from Lord Byron's *Age of Bronze*—lines which were warmly applauded, and which were frequently afterwards made use of by the advocates of Free Trade :—

‘For what were all these landed patriots born?  
To hunt, and vote, and raise the price of corn.  
Safe in their barns these Sabine tillers sent  
Their brethren out to battle—why?—for rent!  
Year after year they voted cent. per cent.,  
Blood, sweat, and tear-wrung millions : why?—for rent!  
They roared, they dined, they drank : they swore they meant  
To die for England. Why then live?—for rent!  
And will they not repay the treasures lent?  
No! down with everything, and up with rent!  
Their good, ill, health, wealth, joy, and discontent,  
Being, end, aim, religion—rent! rent! rent!’

Paulton, who seems to have been both eloquent and imbued with a sense of the complete justice of the cause, was now invited to attend great meetings in other towns, and the opinion fast spread, alike in the centres of population and the agricultural districts, that the Corn Laws were injurious to the interests of all classes of the country.

The Manchester Chamber of Commerce was stirred to action, and at one of its meetings, Mr. Cobden, after showing the evil effects of restriction upon trade, entreated the members not to suffer themselves to be deluded by any other plan which the aristocracy might, with a view to lead them upon a wrong scent, propose to do, whether by war or diplomacy, to benefit trade. He exhorted them to keep a steadfast eye on the Corn Law, which was the real and only obstacle to a steady and large increase of their trade. In the end, a petition to Parliament, drawn up by Mr. Cobden, was adopted by the Chamber. The petition set forth the disadvantages under which British trade and manufactures laboured, and thus proceeded : ‘Your petitioners cannot too earnestly make known that the evils are occasioned by our impolitic and unjust legislation, which, by preventing



the British manufacturer from exchanging the produce of his labour for the corn of other countries, enables our foreign rivals to purchase their food at one-half the price at which it is sold in this market; and your petitioners declare it to be their solemn conviction that this is the commencement only of a state of things which, unless arrested by a timely repeal of all protective duties upon the importation of corn and all foreign articles of subsistence, must eventually transfer our manufacturing industry into other and rival countries.' This petition contained in brief the chief arguments of the Free-traders, holding it to be the inalienable right of every man freely to exchange the results of his labour for the productions of other people, and maintaining that the practice of protecting one part of the community at the expense of all other classes was unsound and unjustifiable.

The members of the League did not underrate the difficulties of the task upon which they had entered. They were opposed by the landowners, by monopolists of all kinds, and by large majorities in the Legislature, the Church, and the State. But they believed themselves to be capable of gaining the support of a united people; and the great body of the people is after all the most powerful, and the only truly irresistible force in this kingdom. Early in January 1839, a meeting was held at the York Hotel, to consider the proper mode of carrying forward the proceedings of the Anti-Corn-Law Association, in a manner commensurate with the magnitude of the obstacles to be surmounted, and worthy of the object for which it had been established. Mr. Holland Hoole, a Conservative, took the chair, representing, he said, all the people in his employment, who with himself were threatened with destruction by the operation of the Corn Laws. Subscriptions were called for, and in a short time a sum of £6136 was announced.

Besides being actively opposed by the Tories, the movement was now seriously obstructed by the Chartists, under the mistaken idea that the repeal of the Corn Laws would be followed by a diminution in the price of labour. One other misunderstanding in connection with the movement may be mentioned here. Miss Harriet Martineau, in her *History of England during the Thirty Years' Peace*, while paying a high tribute to the Free-trade leaders,

observed that 'they were surprised to find how little they themselves knew when they first devoted themselves to the cause. The deepest of them had scarcely an idea how closely the interests of the agriculturists were involved in the establishment of a free trade in food, and how society was injured through all its ramifications by an artificial restriction in the first article of human necessity.' Now Mr. Prentice avers, in reply to this, that from the very commencement of the agitation, the mutual dependence of agricultural and manufacturing interests had been made a strong point by the advocates of free commerce. Certainly the speeches of Mr. Cobden and Mr. Bright on this question show that they were fully alive to the fact that the interests of commerce and agriculture were in a mutual and equal degree bound up in Free-trade measures.

Delegate meetings were now held in London, Manchester, and other places ; and Mr. Villiers—who was amongst the earliest and most earnest pioneers in the movement—periodically disturbed the complacency of the Protectionist majority of the House of Commons by motions on the subject of the Corn Laws ; but although the majority against him showed symptoms of decline, it still continued to be great and formidable. The organisation now assumed a larger character, and in 1839 became formally known as the National Anti-Corn-Law League. An organ of the new movement, entitled the *Anti-Corn-Law Circular*, appeared in Manchester, and in the course of a few weeks attained a circulation of fifteen thousand copies, though this did not represent its entire influence, as it was passed from hand to hand. The monopolists became alarmed, and their association, 'The Central Agricultural Society of Great Britain and Ireland,' set to work to counteract the influence of the League. But the establishment of the penny postage placed a wonderful engine at the service of the latter.\*

\* By way of showing also that the intellectual press of London was ahead of the nation in this matter of the Corn Laws, we may state that in the year 1839 the following influential journals earnestly advocated repeal—the *Sun*, the *Athenæum*, the *Spectator*, the *Dispatch*, the *Planet*, the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Morning Advertiser*, the *Globe*, the *Examiner*, the *Patriot*, the *Charter*, and the *Weekly True Sun*. Nor must the conspicuous service rendered by some fifty provincial journals of ability be forgotten. These included the *Scotsman*, the *Leeds Mercury*, the *Manchester Times*, the

Mr. Bright early took part in the movement, his name, as we have seen, standing second on the list of the first provisional committee. On the 2d of February 1839, an Anti-Corn-Law meeting was held in the open air at Rochdale. Several thousand persons were present, and the Chartists—whose erroneous views we have already referred to—mustered in great force. Mr. Bright spoke for the first time on the question of Free Trade, and moved the following resolution: ‘That it is the opinion of this meeting that the Corn Laws have had the effect of crippling the commerce and manufactures of the country—have raised up rival manufactories in foreign countries—have been most injurious and oppressive in their operation upon the great bulk of our population,—and that the working classes have been grievously injured by this monopoly of the landed proprietors.’ Mr. Bright dwelt upon the fact that it was not a party question, for men of all parties were united upon it. It was a pantry question, he maintained—in homely but forcible language—a knife-and-fork question, a question between the working millions and the aristocracy. Before the American tariff was laid on, one-fifth of the flannel manufactured in Rochdale went to America; but since that tariff was imposed, which was in consequence of the Corn Laws, there had not been as many pieces sent there as there had been bales before. It was the duty of the Government to protect the rights of industry, and it was the interest of the working classes to assist in calling for the repeal of the Corn Laws. After Mr. Bright’s speech, Mr. James Taylor, a Chartist, proposed an amendment to the effect, that although the Corn Law was an injurious tax, no House of Commons constituted on the existing suffrage would repeal that law; and therefore it was necessary first that the people should obtain possession of their political rights. The amendment was carried, the Chartists at that moment having the ear of the working classes in the chief towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire.

Mr. Cobden having pressed Mr. Bright to assume a more

*Aberdeen Herald, the Birmingham Journal, the Bradford Observer, the Liverpool Chronicle, the Sheffield Independent, the Dundee Advertiser, the Brighton Herald, and the Bolton Free Press.*

prominent part in the League movement, the latter spoke in public on the question (for the first time save at Rochdale) at a dinner given at Bolton in 1839 to Mr. Paulton. He is described as being then a young man, 'giving evidence, by his energy and his grasp of the subject, of his capacity soon to take a leading part in the great agitation.' Shortly afterwards, that is on the 29th of January 1840, he attended a meeting called at Rochdale for the purpose of forming a branch of the League, on which occasion he explained its objects. A committee was formed, of which he was appointed treasurer; and in the course of a few weeks a petition against the Corn Laws was forwarded to the House of Commons. The movement must have taken deep root in a short time, for the petition embraced nearly ten thousand signatures. Evidence was in fact furnished daily of the great and growing interest now taken in this question.

In the year 1840 it was resolved to build the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, Mr. Cobden, who owned nearly all the unoccupied land in St. Peter's Field, offering a site for that purpose. By a singular coincidence it happened to be the very spot where, in the year 1819, the Peterloo massacre occurred. Pending the erection of the permanent hall for the purposes of the League, a temporary pavilion was constructed, and on the 13th of January an imposing demonstration was held, attended by nearly thirty members of Parliament, and delegates from all parts of the country. Mr. Bright was present as one of the Rochdale delegates. The principal speakers were Daniel O'Connell, Mr. Villiers, and Mr. Cobden. In a note upon the meeting, we read that a 'Suffolk landowner, Thomas Milner Gibson, appeared on this occasion, for the first time, before a Manchester audience, and by his youthful and gentlemanly appearance, and by the mingled good humour and pungency with which he demolished the arguments and statements of men of his own class, from whom he had come out to make common cause with the people, made a most favourable impression.'

Great meetings now followed each other in rapid succession, and deputations of delegates waited upon Lord Melbourne, and other members of the Ministry, but nothing more substantial was obtained than the usual exhibition of official politeness. Mr. Villiers renewed

his motion in the House of Commons, but could scarcely obtain a hearing in consequence of the uproar on the Protectionist benches. Mr. Mark Philips also made an unsuccessful attempt to be heard amid the deafening clamour, and the motion was lost by 300 to 177. In the country, ladies now began to give their services in aid of the movement. One old lady, eighty years of age, assured Mr. Prentice that in her daily prayers for daily bread she also prayed for a blessing on the good work of Richard Cobden, and of all who were labouring that the afflicted poor should enjoy, in their humble homes, an abundance of the gifts which God had bestowed for the use of man. In the Manchester Corn Exchange, a great gathering was held on October 29th, chiefly consisting of ladies, in support of the agitation. Replying to the charge of those who complained of the want of delicacy in the ladies who thus took the part of the poor and the needy, M. Bastiat says, 'Because the times are changed; because the age is advanced; because muscular force has given place to moral energy; because injustice and oppression borrow other forms, and strife is removed from the field of battle to the conflict of ideas, shall the mission of woman be terminated? Shall she always be restricted to the rear in the social movement? Shall it be forbidden to her to exercise over new customs her benignant influence, or to foster under her regard the virtues of a more elevated order which modern civilisation has called into existence? No! This cannot be. There is no point in the upward movement of humanity at which the empire of woman stops for ever. As civilisation transforms and elevates itself, this empire must be transformed and elevated with it, not annihilated;—there would then be an inexplicable void in the social harmony, and in the providential order of things.' No class of the people could be more deeply interested in the abrogation of the Corn Laws than the women of the existing and the mothers of a future generation.

In 1840 the League made large use of the press in the dissemination of its views. It appears that during this year 763 petitions, with 775,840 signatures, were sent to the House of Commons; and 22, with 78,000 signatures, to the House of Lords. Handbills and tracts to the number of a million and a quarter were distributed, as

well as 20,000 copies of the *Anti-Corn-Law Almanack*, and 330,000 copies of the *Anti-Corn-Law Circular*. In the following year the association was equally active. On the 15th of April, at a meeting held in Manchester, at which some two thousand persons were present, Mr. Bright moved a resolution that members of Parliament should be waited upon and invited to support Mr. Villiers' forthcoming motion. He spoke, it is said, effectively, but very briefly, on the misery occasioned by the Corn Laws. At a later meeting, these resolutions, proposed by Mr. Bright, were adopted: 'That under the more encouraging circumstances in which this question of the bread tax is now placed, it is highly expedient that redoubled efforts be made to obtain a full expression of public opinion in condemnation of that unjust and inhuman enactment;' and 'That, in order to carry into effect the foregoing resolution, a deputation shall be sent to Birmingham, Hull, Bristol, and Newcastle, and such other towns as the Council think proper, in order to rouse the inhabitants to the absolute necessity of making increased exertions to forward petitions to the House of Commons at this important crisis of the great question of the repeal of the bread tax.' An address, written by Mr. George Wilson, chairman of the Council of the League, was also distributed throughout the kingdom.

On the 27th of May, Sir Robert Peel's motion in the House of Commons, declaratory of a want of confidence in the Whig Government, was carried by a majority of one, the numbers being, for the motion, 312; against, 311. Upon this, Lord John Russell said Ministers intended to appeal to the country, and Parliament was at once dissolved. In the elections which ensued, Mr. Cobden was elected for Stockport, it being expected that he would take a leading part in Parliament upon the Free-trade question. Mr. Bright was present in the House when Mr. Cobden made his first speech, and subsequently gave a description of the scene. The great Leaguer's maiden effort excited considerable interest; and there was much speculation, said Mr. Bright, as to the position he would take in the House. Mr. Horace Twiss (of the *Times*), near whom in the gallery Mr. Bright sat, was a Tory of the old school. 'He appeared to have the greatest possible horror of anybody who was a manu-

facturer or a calico printer coming down into the assembly to teach our senators wisdom. As the speech went on, I watched his countenance, and heard his observations; and when Mr. Cobden sat down, he said with a careless gesture, "Nothing in him; he is only a barker." . . . Well, now, I believe, there is no reason to doubt the fact that some of Mr. Cobden's speeches—one in particular that I recollect in connection with the effect of protection on agriculture—had such an effect upon the mind and opinions of Sir Robert Peel, that if I were to point out any one thing that mainly brought Sir R. Peel to be a Free-trader not long afterwards, I should point to the speech made on that particular night by Mr. Cobden. This "barker" of Horace Twiss became a great power in the House of Commons, and a great power in the country. Now I had the good fortune after the year 1841, and for five years, and, in fact, for something longer than five years, to be most intimately and closely associated with him in his labour. I can speak of his industry and his sagacity, of the incessant correspondence in which he was engaged, and I can speak also of the speeches he delivered. I remember the beautiful and yet homely illustrations with which they were filled. I recollect well how at every meeting he attended I could see the truth, as it were, spreading from his lips, and permeating the minds of all those who heard him, till you could see in their countenances and eyes that they had got hold of a new truth that they would keep for ever.' While not an orator of the first rank, Mr. Cobden had qualities which enabled him to secure for himself a position in the House of Commons at once powerful and unique.

The elections went against Ministers, and, being defeated upon the Address by a majority of 91 in the Commons, they resigned. Sir Robert Peel accordingly became Prime Minister. Meanwhile, the League did not relax its energies, and it was now assisted by a great religious movement in favour of the agitation. The condition of the country at this time was lamentable. Statistics collected showed that there were no fewer than 20,936 persons in Leeds whose average earnings were only elevenpence three-farthings a week. One-fourth of the whole population of Paisley was in a state bordering upon actual starvation; and in one district in









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Manchester a visitor found 258 families, consisting of 1029 persons, whose average earnings were only sevenpence halfpenny per head per week. 'In Spitalfields,' said Mr. Dunkley, in his *Charter of Nations*, '8000 looms were idle, and 24,000 persons thrown upon parochial relief. In the metropolis 1000 letterpress printers and 9000 tailors were altogether without work.' The same tale of suffering came from all the great manufacturing towns; and the terrible condition of the people was further aggravated by the fact that wheat, which stood at an exceedingly high price, was charged an import duty of nearly twenty-five shillings per quarter.

The year set in gloom upon the great masses of the population, and not without a dawning conviction upon the mind of the new Conservative Prime Minister, that a relaxation of the restrictive laws, which perpetuated and aggravated the distress of the country, was fast becoming imperative.

## CHAPTER VI.

*THE BATTLE OF THE LEAGUE (continued).*

Great distress amongst the Working Classes.—Meeting of Free-trade Delegates in London in February 1842.—Sir Robert Peel's Sliding Scale.—Continued Destitution in the Country.—The Duke of Sussex and the League.—Scene outside the House of Commons.—Deputations to Ministers.—The Chartist Rising.—Mr. Bright issues an Address to the Working Men of Rochdale.—Tour through the Midlands.—Mr. Bright in the North.—Lord Brougham and the Repealers.—Opening of the Free Trade Hall at Manchester.—Sir Robert Peel and Mr. Cobden.—Extraordinary Scene in the House of Commons.—Sympathy in the country with Mr. Cobden.—Speech by Mr. Bright.—Carlyle on the Corn Laws.—League Meetings at Drury Lane Theatre.—The Agitation in 1843.—Tour of Mr. Cobden and Mr. Bright.—The Question in the House of Commons.—The League gains influential Adherents.—Meetings in 1844.—Demonstration in Covent Garden Theatre.—Address by Mr. Bright.—Registration Movement by the League.—Increase of Freeholds.—Peel's Budget of 1845.—Mr. Cobden's Motion on the Agricultural Distress.—Great Free-trade Bazaar at Covent Garden.—Mr. Villiers' last Motion on the Corn Laws in the House of Commons.—Speeches of Sir J. Graham, Mr. Bright, and Mr. Cobden.—The Question approaching its final Settlement.



TOWARDS the close of the year 1841, the League appointed commissioners to investigate the appalling condition of the working-classes, and the details collected of their suffering and destitution were most heartrending. At a meeting held at Manchester on the 16th of December, to consider the depression in the manufacturing districts, Mr. Bright presented an account of the state of things in Rochdale, where the flannel trade had been almost annihilated in consequence of the American tariff, the inevitable effect of the diminished demand for flannel goods being scarcity of employment and a fall of wages. 'We saw around us,' said Mr.

Bright, 'wide-spreading distress. Misery was seen in the house of every poor man. Poor men he was ashamed to call them, but that was the term now applied to every working man. Misery was to be seen on his very threshold; haggard destitution and extreme poverty were the most prominent things in his family. The consequence was, that discontent had so pervaded the country that scarcely any working man would lift a finger in defence of those institutions which Englishmen were wont to be proud of. Neither the monarch nor the aristocracy were safe under such a state of things—a state of things that would blast the fairest prospects and destroy the most powerful nation that ever existed.' On the motion of Mr. Bright, this resolution was carried:—'That the district of which Manchester is the centre, engaged in the various branches of the cotton trade and its dependencies, is suffering under a general depression, the duration of which has no parallel in the history of Lancashire; that it is in evidence before this meeting that the condition of the surrounding population, both employer and operative, is greatly deteriorated; that fixed capital, such as buildings, machinery, &c., has depreciated in value nearly one-half since 1835; that capitalists, as a body, have long ceased to obtain a profitable return for their investments; that bankruptcy and insolvency have alarmingly increased; that the shopkeepers have suffered corresponding reverses; that the reward of labour has been generally diminished; that great numbers of skilful and deserving workmen are either wholly or partially unemployed; and that pauperism, disease, crime, and mortality have made fearful inroads amongst the poorer classes of the community; that, in the opinion of the deputies now assembled from the various towns of Lancashire, all these evils are experienced at the present moment with unmitigated severity, and that there is no visible prospect of any amelioration of the distresses of this great community.'

Early in 1842 meetings were held at Gloucester, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow—and in fact throughout the length and breadth of the land,—and at many of them farmers attended, who unhesitatingly admitted that they had no reason to fear for the ruin of their order from the working classes of the manufacturing towns.

being permitted their just right to exchange the produce of their industry for food raised in foreign lands.

Pending an anticipated measure from Ministers for the revision of the Corn Laws, an important meeting of Free-trade delegates was held in London on the 8th of February 1842, at the Crown and Anchor, Strand. Mr. Duncan M'Laren, afterwards M.P. for Edinburgh, presided, and amongst the speakers was Mr. Bright, who now stepped into the front rank of the repealers. His address was full of power, and its effect was such that every future appearance of the orator was eagerly looked forward to, and welcomed with delight. On this occasion, Mr. Bright said he came from a neighbourhood where the question was looked upon as one of life and death by thousands of honest men ; and if there were any in that room, as there were many, who had no conception of the state of things to which this country was fast hastening under these mischievous laws, he should like them to go with him into the streets and lanes where he could take them, and if they had any intellect, any heart, he was sure they would go away fully convinced of the necessity of the total and immediate repeal of the law. Referring to the flannel trade of his native town, he said that he was not interested in it in any way, but he knew the extent to which the Corn Laws had operated against that trade. Several thousand persons in his neighbourhood were driven from their country as the result of the operation of the Corn Laws. Amidst general cheering, Mr. Bright said that in consequence of the glaring evils of those laws, he had turned his attention to them day and night, and he was firmly convinced that there was no point of view in which they did not manifest their evil operation, and call for total and immediate abolition. He stated that his motion was to pledge the deputies never to swerve from their purpose, nor relax in their efforts, until the total repeal of the Corn Laws was accomplished ; and this he enforced 'with so much argument, and so energetic and fervent an eloquence, that at the close of his spirit-stirring address the whole assembly rose and testified their approbation by loud and long-continued hurrahs.' From this time forward, Mr. Bright came into special prominence, and his name was now coupled with those of the other popular

leaders in the movement—Cobden, Villiers, and Wilson. In conjunction with them he was instrumental in forming many provincial branches of the League.

Sir Robert Peel's measure, providing for a sliding scale in the duty on corn, was carried during this session, after prolonged debates. During one of these debates, Mr. Cobden said that upon the shoulders of the Premier would the people fix the whole of the responsibility for their present position. On the third reading he further entered a solemn protest against the bill, denouncing it as a robbery of the poor. The new tariff with the sliding scale became law; and the best proof that it was inadequate to meet the necessities of the case was the relief felt by the Protectionists that they had come off so cheaply.

The members of the Anti-Corn-Law Conference again assembled on the 4th of July, at Herbert's Hotel, Palace Yard. Mr. P. A. Taylor presided, and Mr. Bright was the first speaker. He observed that the distress had now become universal. If they went to Scotland, they found Forfar, Glasgow, Paisley, in desolation. If they came further south, in Newcastle almost the whole of the working population were out of employment, and were living on the charity given out by the Town Council. He had a letter from Shields, in which it was stated that the trade was almost annihilated. In Lancashire, the working population of many towns were actually subsisting on charity. Bolton and Stockport were in a state of desolation. In Leeds it was still worse; there were thirty or forty thousand persons existing upon charity alone. In Sheffield, men were driven to the lowest state of distress; and it was the same in Derbyshire. He had seen a letter in the *Morning Chronicle*, giving an account of the state of Hinckley, in Leicestershire, and he would recommend all to read it, as it gave a faithful picture of the prevalent distress. Going still further south, in the agricultural counties of England the poor-rates were at that moment rapidly on the increase. The labouring population of Somersetshire were living on charity. If they went on to that part of the country, they would find that twenty or thirty thousand persons were now out of employment who were a short time before in comparative comfort. In Ireland they



found that famine was stalking through the land, and that riots were taking place, men being killed by the police merely because they endeavoured to obtain food. How, then, could they sit calmly by? Humanity, if nothing more, would call them from their homes. But there was a feeling of policy—their own safety and the safety of the country were at stake. Mr. Bright added that there was one remedy, but it had been rejected by the Legislature. Much would depend on the course taken by the delegates, and he prayed that they might enable the Government to see that the time had come when this question could no longer be tampered with; that the time had arrived when justice and mercy must take the place of cruelty and oppression; and if the Government should still refuse to hearken, he for one trembled at the result.

Observing that the people themselves had the power to compel a settlement of this question, Mr. Bright added: 'There were other weapons than those of war; there were other weapons beside those which wounded the body; there was a most beautiful and admirable system which the people had in their own power, to which he was fully persuaded they were rapidly drifting, and which, if put into active operation, could not fail to bring the struggle to an active issue.'

Mr. Bright's statements as to the condition of the country were abundantly corroborated by other delegates. The representative from Wolverhampton stated that there were sixty-two blast furnaces lying idle; and the Stockport delegate stated that a poor-rate in that town, which in 1839 at 1s. 8d. had produced £5000, now failed to produce £3600 at 2s. The poor-rate at Manchester went up to 3s. 4d. in the pound. At Burslem, the people became greatly excited, and the military required to be called out.

At this juncture, the cultured and liberal-minded Duke of Sussex expressed his sympathy with the objects of the League. A deputation had been appointed to wait upon him, and Mr. Bright reported that he and his coadjutors had been received by His Royal Highness with the utmost cordiality and friendliness. Although he did not think that everything wrong was to be attributed to the Corn Laws, he admitted that they had been the

occasion of a great deal of evil, and he himself had always been strenuously opposed to them. His Royal Highness, said Mr. Bright, appeared to be exceedingly well informed on the subject, and it was evident he kept well up with the newspapers. He promised to do everything in his power to further their object, and, if they wished it, would find a way of presenting a memorial to the Queen; but she could not give them a reply, as she could not constitutionally do acts of sovereignty except through the agency of her Ministers. The Duke expressed great commiseration with the distress of the country, and the deputation had come away with a good opinion both of his heart and his understanding.

The delegates continued vigorously to prosecute their mission; and on one occasion, being denied admission into the lobby of the House of Commons, they congregated round the entrance, shouting 'Total repeal' and 'Cheap food' as the members entered. Meeting on their retirement from the House the carriage of Sir Robert Peel, their cries caused the Premier to lean back in his carriage, with a pale and grave countenance. The delegates next waited upon the Home Secretary, Sir James Graham, to whom they unfolded their story; but Sir James for the moment seemed unable to conceive that there was general and severe distress in the country, because a few new mills had been erected in Manchester! Mr. Bright deprecated making the question one of mills, or of Manchester only; the greatest distress prevailed where there were no mills. Proceeding next to the Board of Trade, the deputation waited upon Lord Ripon ('Prosperity Robinson') and Mr. Gladstone. This was the first public occasion on which the present Premier and Mr. Bright, since sometimes his colleague, met. Allusion having been made to the United States, Lord Ripon said that the Americans themselves had a law against the admission of Canadian wheat; whereupon Mr. Bright retorted, 'Yes, and the promoters of that measure quoted our example as a precedent.' The President of the Board of Trade declined to discuss the question at length. Mr. Gladstone inquired whether there were any symptoms of improvement in trade, but was answered that the distress, so far from being alleviated, was greatly aggravated. With this the conference closed, Sir Robert Peel

himself, however, at the close of an interview with one of the deputation, thanked its members for the testimony they had borne, and which he feared was incontestable.

The Chartists at this time exercised great influence over the factory workers in the large towns of Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Cheshire; and there was a strong turn-out of hands in Ashton-under-Lyne, Manchester, Dukinfield, Oldham, Stalybridge, and other places. It was feared that riots would ensue, especially as in Manchester a public procession was talked of, and Feargus O'Connor was expected. It was not a question of advance of wages with the Chartists; it was rather a demand for the Charter; and it was thought a general stoppage of work would compel the Government to concede it. But the agitation was rendered innocuous by the attitude of the masters. The Chartist leaders had represented to the operatives that they must carry the day, in consequence of the universality of the movement. Many of the employers, however, had no objection to allow their mills to stand idle, when their standing still was about as profitable as working. Sir Benjamin Heywood issued an address to the working men of Manchester, demonstrating the folly and short-sightedness of the movement.

The agitation extended of course to Rochdale, amongst other towns. Factory workers were ordered to leave the mills, the establishment of Messrs. Bright being amongst the number where a turn-out was demanded by the Chartists. The manufacturers of the town resisted the demands made upon them, and after one of the meetings on Cronkeyshaw Common, Mr. Bright addressed a large number of persons near Greenbank Mill. He said it was a great mistake to resort to violence by plug-drawing (emptying the boilers, and so stopping the mills), and that violence would not serve any good cause; that the strike was a mistake if it was undertaken for a political object, and he hoped they would keep the peace while the struggle lasted. For his own firm, he could say that they were prepared to open their mill any day when the workpeople were ready to return to their work, Mr. Bright also issued an address 'To the Working Men of Rochdale,' in which

he brought forward cogent arguments against strikes. 'Many of you,' he said, 'know full well that neither Act of Parliament nor act of a multitude can keep up wages. You know that trade has long been bad, and with a bad trade wages cannot rise. If you are resolved to compel an advance of wages, you cannot compel manufacturers to give you employment. Trade must yield a profit, or it will not long be carried on; and an advance of wages now would destroy profit.' Replying to those leaders who recommended the workpeople to give up the question of wages, and stand upon the Charter, the writer observed: 'The working classes can never gain it of themselves. Physical force you wisely repudiate. It is immoral, and you have no arms, and little organisation. Moral force can only succeed through the electors, and these are not yet convinced. The principles of the Charter will one day be established; but years *may* pass over, months *must* pass over, before that day arrives. You cannot stand idle till it comes. Your only means of living are from the produce of your own labour. Unhappily, you have wives and children, and all of you have the cravings of hunger; and you must live, and in order to live you must work.' Having shown that the Chartist leaders were deceiving the masses, as they knew that their objects were not attainable in the way they indicated, Mr. Bright continued: 'If every employer and workman in the kingdom were to swear on his bended knees that wages should not fall, they would assuredly fall if the Corn Law continues. No power on earth can maintain your wages at their present rate if the Corn Law be not repealed. You may doubt this now, but consider the past, I beseech you; what the past tells you the future will confirm. You may not thank me for thus addressing you, but nevertheless I am your friend. Your own class does not include a man more sincerely anxious than I am to obtain for you both industrial and political freedom. You have found me on all occasions, if a feeble, yet an honest and zealous defender; and I trust in this, time will work no change in me. My heart sympathises deeply in your sufferings. I believe I know whence they mainly spring, and would gladly relieve them. I would willingly become poor, if that would make you comfortable

and happy. To such of you as have been employed at the mills with which I am connected, I may add that as soon as you are disposed to resume your work, the doors shall be open to you. I invite you to come, and you shall be treated as, I trust, you have ever been—as I would ever wish you to treat me.’ The address was not without its effect, and Mr. Bright’s counsel was speedily followed. Although tumults arose in some districts, the Chartist agitation subsided without those fearful consequences which in the outset were anticipated.

As the result of a tour which Mr. Bright and Mr. Cobden made on behalf of the League through the Midlands, they raised in subscriptions about £3000 towards the £50,000 which was asked as a special fund for the purposes of the Association. Speaking subsequently at a meeting in Manchester, Mr. Bright said that he had felt humiliated by the manner in which he and his friends had been treated at every meeting they had addressed; persons who came from the Anti-Corn-Law League were looked upon as the very deliverers of the commerce of the country from the shackles in which it had been so long enthralled. ‘The time is now come when we must no longer regard this infamous law as a mistake on the part of the aristocracy and the landowners—it was no mistake of the landowners, no accident; chance had nothing to do with it; it was a crime of the deepest dye against the rights and industry, and against the well-being of the British people; and

“Not all that heralds rake from confined clay,  
Nor florid prose nor honied lines of rhyme,  
Can blazon evil deeds, or consecrate a crime!”

Mr. Bright was indefatigable in the cause of the League, attending and addressing meetings about this time at Sheffield, Huddersfield, Coventry, Liverpool, Bradford, Halifax, Woodside, Kendal, Carlisle, Newcastle-on-Tyne, South Shields, Rochdale, Sunderland, and Darlington. In all these large towns, and in other districts also, the principles of the League made rapid and striking progress.

On the 29th of December Mr. Bright spoke at a large meeting in the Corn Exchange, Manchester, and his address on that occasion

seems to have aroused the audience to an unwonted pitch of enthusiasm. We have already quoted an extract from this speech, but it demands further notice. The speaker gave first an account of the meetings which had been attended by deputations from the League, showing the extraordinary feeling which the movement had evoked in the minds of the population. The other towns looked up to Manchester as the metropolis of the empire at that moment. They were not looking to London to lead them on this question; they believed that in Manchester was the centre and heart of the great demonstration being made throughout the country in condemnation of the iniquitous Corn Laws. Mr. Bright went on to refer to the retaliating tariffs of other nations, the distress inflicted upon the population of our own land by the diminution of trade, the constant struggle for daily bread, and the consequent competition in the labour market diminishing wages, the wretched culture of land under protection, the exemption of landowners from their fair share of taxation, the miserable condition of the protected farmers and farm labourers, the insecurity of property in the agricultural districts; and he claimed for the League the merit of being the best friend to the farmers, and to the community generally, that they had ever known. Mr. Bright cautioned his hearers against allowing the struggle to be made a mere plaything between the two political parties, and after observing that the League was feared and hated by those upon whom rested the guilt of the Corn Laws, he remarked, in conclusion, 'To the landed aristocracy, to the monopolist and bankrupt portion of them, we say, We do not ask you to repeal the Corn Law, and to loose your grasp from the subsistence of this most industrious and meritorious, and yet most injured population,—we do not ask it from your sense of justice and from your love of right, for had you possessed either the one or the other this infamous law would never have been enacted,—but we appeal to what is more honest and more virtuous, we appeal to the millions of our countrymen who are awakening to the wrongs they have so long and so patiently endured, and to the consciousness that it is you who have inflicted them,—we appeal to the honesty and intelligence of the middle classes of this empire, in the full confidence that the hour is

at hand when their united voices shall be heard above the roar of party, and shall decree the immediate and the utter and everlasting extinction of this odious and inhuman and most unnatural law.'

One who was present at this meeting, and witnessed the fervour caused by Mr. Bright's speech, uttered the following prediction with regard to the most eloquent defender of the League: 'Though it is asserted that the League will dissolve, and its public men retire to private business or private life, when its purposes are accomplished—though the League may dissolve and its men seek retirement, and though the Friends should continue as unassuming as they have ever been, Mr. John Bright will, if he lives long enough, be a leading man in the British Legislature. I am not aware that he ever whispered the probability of his becoming a member, to say nothing of a leader, but talents like his will take root too firmly in the public mind, long before the Corn Law repeal is accomplished, to admit of his retirement, even were he desirous of repose.' The Free Trade advocate had already made it apparent that his eloquence was far from being circumscribed, and his sympathies far from being narrowed and exhausted, by the cause of the League—admirable though that cause might be.

As the League was now too great a fact to be ignored, its members were exhorted by the timid and the hesitating to wait and see what Peel would do. But the Council took a different view of the matter, and issued an address, signed by the chairman, Mr. George Wilson, to the people of England. The Common Council of London had emphatically and almost unanimously denounced the Corn Laws, and the metropolis was now appealed to, to place itself at the head of the movement.

Such men as Mr. Fox Maule, with the prospect or the actual possession of a large stake in the country as landowners—now declared themselves in favour of total and unconditional repeal. Mr. Bright referred to this at one of the League meetings, and in describing a tour he had made in Scotland, said that at Edinburgh no fewer than twenty-nine ministers of religion were upon the platform. They had taken up the question in the conscientious belief that it was one nearly allied to the duties of the office which

they had assumed. The mother of Mr. Drummond, — under-secretary to the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, and a gentleman who would be long remembered on account of one single sentence that he had addressed to the Irish landowners, viz., ‘Property has its duties as well as its rights,’ — sent a subscription to the League, thus showing that she coincided in the view that her son had expressed. At various towns in Scotland landed proprietors came forward to express their sympathy with the movement.

The Manchester Free Trade Hall—one of the most famous buildings in the country, and with the exception of Westminster Hall, the largest in the kingdom—was opened on the 30th of January 1843. At the commencement of the proceedings, Mr. George Wilson read a list of contributions to the £50,000 fund, amounting to £40,600, of which sum Manchester subscribed £7000, Glasgow £2500, Liverpool £2200, and Rochdale £2200. The remaining portion of the fund was speedily forthcoming, although the promoters of the scheme had been laughed at as foolishly sanguine for asking such a sum as £50,000. A series of meetings were held in the new hall, Mr. Bright being amongst the speakers at several of the gatherings.

Early in 1843, a singular misunderstanding occurred between Lord Brougham and the Repealers, which resulted in a correspondence between his lordship and Mr. Bright. The clever but irascible peer demanded from Mr. Bright a disclaimer of what he described as an ‘atrocious falsehood’ published in the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* (as the organ of the League was now called), to the effect that he had importuned a League deputation to entrust him with a motion in the House of Lords on the subject of the Corn Laws. Mr. Bright, in his reply, defended the League generally; but the anger of Lord Brougham was not in any degree mitigated. The article which had so greatly irritated him was not from the pen of Mr. Bright.

In the month of February, the House of Commons was invited to discuss the question of Free Trade on a side issue. Lord Howick moved for a committee to inquire into the distress of the country, and during the lengthy debate which ensued Mr. Gladstone



made the significant admission that if a change in the Corn Law were to take place, and if that change were to procure an increased importation of foreign corn, and if that importation of foreign corn were to be paid for in British manufactures, he thought it would be taking a most short and false view of the interests of British agriculture to view that importation of foreign corn as so much displacement of British agricultural commerce. The first effect would be that it might reduce prices, but undoubtedly it would give a demand for the labour of those now unemployed, and thereby create a new class of producers, and raise the wages of those who had now low wages, thus enabling them to consume more largely. Mr. Disraeli, as a sanguine Protectionist, thought that if time were given for the operation of natural causes, trade would certainly revive! He made no allowance for the other hypothesis that by the operation of these same natural causes harvests might be blighted, trade destroyed, and the people starved.

On the fifth night of the debate a strange scene occurred. After the speech of Mr. Cobden, which was an unanswerable argument in favour of repeal, Sir Robert Peel rose, and in his excitement indirectly insinuated that Mr. Cobden was inclined to favour assassination against him. Here is an account of this brief but painful episode:—

*Sir Robert Peel.* ‘Sir, the hon. gentleman has stated here very emphatically, what he has more than once stated at the Conference of the Anti-Corn-Law League, that he holds me individually (these words, which were pronounced with much solemnity of manner, were followed by a loud cheer from the Ministerial benches, of a very peculiar and emphatic kind. It lasted a considerable time, and while it continued, and for some time afterwards, the House presented an appearance of extreme excitement, the members in the galleries standing up, and many of those below speaking eagerly to each other)—individually responsible for the distress and suffering of the country; that he holds me personally responsible. (Renewed cheering of the same character.) Be the consequences of those insinuations what they may—(cheering renewed with great vehemence)—never will I be influenced by menaces—(continued cheering)—to adopt a course which I consider—(the rest of the sentence was lost in renewed shouts from the Ministerial benches).’

*Mr. Cobden.* ‘I did not say that I held the right hon. gentleman personally responsible. (Shouts from the Ministerial benches of “Yes, yes; you did, you did,” mingled with cries of “Order” and “Chair.”) I have said that I hold the right hon. gentleman responsible by virtue of his office—(renewed shouts from the same quarter, cries of

"No, no," and confusion)—as the whole context of what I said was sufficient to explain. (Renewed cries of "No, no," from the Ministerial benches.)

It was generally admitted that for this unhappy incident Sir Robert Peel was wholly responsible. In mitigation, however, it must be added that the Premier was suffering from highly-overwrought and nervous feelings, in consequence of the attempt at his assassination, which had resulted in the death of his secretary, Mr. Drummond. Indeed, Sir Robert admitted immediately afterwards that he was not certain Mr. Cobden used the word personally. He ought therefore to have frankly accepted the emphatic disclaimer twice repeated by the latter. The result of the debate was that Lord Howick's motion was rejected by 306 to 191 votes.

Peel was credited in some quarters, notwithstanding his continued opposition to repeal, with a desire to settle the question, if he could see his way to it. Meanwhile, the Conservatives were being urged to repeal in various directions. Carlyle, in his *Past and Present*, begged them to hasten, for the sake of Conservatism itself, to probe Protection vigorously, and to cast it forth at once and for ever if guilty. 'If I were the Conservative party of England,' he said, 'I would not for a hundred thousand pounds an hour allow those Corn Laws to continue. Potosi and Golconda put together would not purchase my assent to them. Do you count what treasuries of bitter indignation they are laying up for you in every just English heart? Do you know what questions, not as to corn prices and sliding scales alone, they are *forcing* every reflective Englishman to ask himself? Questions insoluble, or hitherto unsolved; deeper than any of our logic-plummets hitherto will sound: questions deep enough, which it were better we did not name, even in thought! You are forcing us to think of them, to begin uttering them. The utterance is begun; and where will it be ended, think you? When now millions of one's brother-men sit in workhouses, and five millions, as is insolently said, "rejoice in potatoes," there are various things that must be begun, let them end where they can.'

At the first metropolitan League meeting held after the melancholy scene in the House of Commons, Mr. Cobden was

received with rapturous cheers, which lasted several minutes, as a protest against the endeavour to fix a stigma upon his name. The hon. member himself expressed his astonishment that he, a member of the Peace Society before he was a politician, and who conscientiously believed that it was worse than useless to take human life even for murder, should be accused of instigating to assassination. Mr. Cobden was followed by Mr. Bright, who claimed for the League the credit of having preserved the peace in an alarming state of affairs in the previous year, and said that to such outbreaks the country would always be liable so long as the Corn Laws existed; but that if they were repealed, there would not need to be maintained a soldier in Lancashire or in Yorkshire.

A great meeting was also held on the 23d of February, in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester—upwards of five thousand persons being present—‘to repudiate the charges made in the Legislature against the League, and more particularly against Richard Cobden, Esq., M.P.’ The word ‘charges’ had reference both to the Peel episode in the Commons and Lord Brougham’s invectives in the Lords. Mr. George Wilson warmly defended the League, and Mr. Absalom Watkin said that they who made the charge did not believe it; but it should be repelled, in order that silence might not be mistaken for acquiescence, and the usefulness of the League be impeded by the infamous calumny. At the same time he thought they should assert fully and clearly the constitutional doctrine of the ‘individual and personal responsibility’ of every Minister of the Crown. This responsibility had never been doubted by any writer on the law of England. Resolutions were passed expressing the highest esteem for Mr. Cobden, and an address was also adopted to him from the inhabitants of Manchester and Salford. Amongst the speakers were Messrs. Henry Ashworth, T. Bazley, Sir T. Potter, John Bright, and Ald. Callender.

After some preliminary observations, Mr. Bright, who spoke with much warmth and energy, said: ‘Every man must deplore the fact that the Prime Minister of this country should have degraded himself by such an exhibition as that which he made in the House of Commons last week. I rejoice that we have so speedily again

an opportunity of meeting in this Hall, to denounce the law which the Prime Minister acknowledges to be unjust, and which he knows full well must soon be repealed. Look at the miserable tactics of our opponents from the beginning. We are not at the climax of the game they have been playing. They treated us at first with ridicule. Afterwards they pretended to meet us with a little argument; and that failed, as it was likely to fail. Then they hinted at the suppression of the League as an illegal association; but though there are laws in this country with meshes so small that it might be possible we should not be able to get through them, yet these laws are laws which no Minister dare enforce, unless he have the sanction of the great body of the intelligent population of this country; and I dare assert that on this question the intelligence of the country, and of the middle classes in particular, is in direct antagonism to the Ministry of the day. This project, then, of suppressing the League as an illegal association did not do, and slander was next resorted to.'

Mr. Bright then severely animadverted on the attempt of Lord Brougham and Mr. Roebuck to crush the League through its most distinguished advocate in the House of Commons, declaring that never was an attempt more vain.

'Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just;  
And he but naked, though locked up in steel,  
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.'

He had experienced sensations of the deepest humiliation when he had witnessed the Protectionists in the House of Commons all conscience-stricken. But what was to be said of the leader of this band of men, who, holding Free-trade opinions, yet shrank from the just responsibility which had been laid upon him? When asked to enforce his opinions, the answer was, 'It is not the time.' 'I ask, when will it be the time? We thought it was time five years ago. I tell you that it is a hypocritical defence to say that this is not the time. It is now the time; the hour is now striking. It is absolutely necessary that this law should be repealed, in order to restore prosperity, and avert from you calamities which I cannot

contemplate without horror. I tell you, men of Manchester, that it is from you must come the deliverance of your country. You have the power to say to this monstrous, this hideous monopoly, "Go back to the den from whence all such hideous things have come, and let honest men enjoy the life that God has given them." I got up for the purpose of proposing that we should present an address to Richard Cobden.'

At the mention of Mr. Cobden's name, the whole meeting burst into a tremendous round of cheering, with waving of hats and handkerchiefs, in which the ladies joined heartily, the demonstration lasting for several minutes. The speaker continued: 'They say that the people are proverbially ungrateful. It is a gross calumny upon them. I do not stand up to flatter the member for Stockport. I believe him to be a very intelligent and very honest man. I believe that he will act with a single eye to the good of his country. I cannot suppose that the triumph of the great principles of which he is so distinguished an advocate is far distant, and when that is accomplished we shall be amply repaid by the marvellous change which in a few years will take place in the moral aspect of this country.'

The League now decided to hold a series of meetings in Drury Lane Theatre. The first of these demonstrations took place on the 15th of March 1843, when pit, boxes, and gallery were all alike densely crowded. Mr. George Wilson presided, and Mr. Cobden made one of his most forcible speeches. The question was, he said, whether the feudal system in this country was to flourish beside an advancing and progressive manufacturing and commercial community. There were manufacturing and commercial communities in other countries, where feudalism did not exist. They would exist here by the side of feudalism, if feudalism would allow them; but if not by the side of feudalism, feudalism would not be permitted to stop the progress of civilisation; if not by the side of it, then the manufacturing and commercial interests would flourish upon the ruins of feudalism.

Mr. Bright—described as 'of Rochdale' for the last time—followed Mr. Cobden. He spoke with great power and effect.

Describing first the pauperised condition of the country, and earnestly warning that great audience that London could not long remain exempt from the general wretchedness, he thus proceeded :—

‘There was no institution of this country—the monarchy, the aristocracy, the Church, or any other whatever—of which he would not say, “Attach it to the Corn Law, and I will predict its fate.” In this country everything which he held dear was contained. In countries not far off they had seen institutions shaken to their foundation by dire calamities. They had seen crowns and hierarchies shaken to the dust ; they had seen ranks, and orders, and parties overthrown ; but there was one party which survived all this, and that party was the people. Whatever convulsion might happen in this country, whatever orders might be overthrown, the people would survive. . . . The people of London were the centre of a great empire, the fate of which was trembling in the balance, and which had long been struggling even to faintness with this great iniquity. The provinces, without which they could not exist, and from which they drew all their wealth, all their sustenance, had done that which was the duty of the people of London. He spoke in the name of the numerous meetings which he had attended throughout the country, and he called on them to raise their voices to the Legislature, and to co-operate with those meetings until that blessed and happy day should arrive when this monopoly should be overthrown, and the blessings which God had provided for the whole of His people, should be enjoyed by all.’

One of the finest orators of the League at this time was Mr. W. J. Fox, who fairly divided the honours of popularity with Cobden and Bright. His speeches had an electrical effect, and Mr. Prentice recalls one extraordinary scene in particular, when he called upon his hearers to bind themselves in a solemn league never to cease their labours till the Corn Laws were destroyed—thousands starting to their feet, with arms extended, as if ready to swear extinction to monopoly. Mr. Bright himself, we have reason for stating, regarded the oratory of Mr. Fox as more powerful and striking than that of any other League speaker. .

The Drury Lane meetings were continued with unflagging spirit and energy ; and by way of further extending its influence, the League now ceased the publication of its small fortnightly *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, and established the *League* weekly newspaper in its stead.

During the year 1843 the League carried their agitation into the agricultural districts. A deputation, consisting of Mr. Ashworth,

Mr. Bright, and Mr. Cobden, visited some of the most highly cultivated parts of Durham, Northumberland, Cumberland, and East Lothian, for the purpose of procuring trustworthy information on the position of agriculture and the views of the farmers. The mission occupied several weeks, and Mr. Ashworth has remarked that the sequence of the initials of the three members of the deputation led to the joke that the 'A B C' of the League had gone to study farming. Mr. Bright and Mr. Cobden subsequently went to the south of England, and addressed meetings respectively at Taunton, Liskeard, Dorchester, Uxbridge, Bedford, Rye, Huntingdon, Colchester, Chelmsford, Lewes, Salisbury, Canterbury, Oxford, &c. At Dorchester, Mr. Bright put the question of the operation of the Corn Law into a nutshell. 'The Corn Law, by preventing imports of corn, and thereby unduly raising the prices during seasons of deficient harvests, takes from the people so much of their earnings as to leave them without the means of keeping up their usual consumption of such articles of clothing, furniture, &c., as they require, and by the making of which millions of people are profitably employed, and paid, and earn a livelihood; and thus, when the general demand for these articles falls off, and men are without employment, distress is brought upon large masses of the people. The home trade, or demand for home products, is thus greatly injured; and whilst this process is going on, the Corn Law is also preventing the extension of the foreign trade, by raising up high duties abroad, and by diminishing the home consumption of foreign commodities, and thus diminishing the amount of exports required to pay for those commodities. But however injurious the Corn Law has been to manufacturers, it has been more destructive of the well-being of the tenant farmers. If it has injured and impoverished the farmers' customers, it must have injured the farmers.' Again, 'The Corn Law renders the farmers wholly dependent upon their landlords. They can scarcely think or act for themselves. They are cajoled or bullied into voting for the landlord's candidate, who as a legislator maintains the Corn Law by which trade is destroyed, and farming made a hazardous and unprofitable business.'

Mr. Cobden, at a county meeting at Bedford, waged a verbal

contest for six hours with the farmers, and in the end his arguments prevailed, a resolution in favour of Free-trade principles being carried by two to one. Farmers generally, in fact, now began to have their faith completely shaken by Mr. Cobden's proofs that no Corn Law could ever guarantee them even 36s. a quarter, and they were already asking, 'What is the use of a Corn Law, if tenants are to get Dantzic prices, and to pay English rents?'

Speaking at Huntingdon, Mr. Bright maintained that the Corn Law was most prejudicial to the interests of the country, and that whether it raised rents or not, it was essentially a rent law, and nothing else. 'There is not a man present,' he said, 'who can place his hand upon his heart and say he does not believe that the farmers have been tricked by political jugglery. The men whom you elect derive more advantage from the present Ministry being in power than anything they can gain from the Corn Law. This Government has hundreds, if not thousands, of offices at its disposal, there being no less than five hundred appointments in India alone; and with the political landlord it becomes very much like Tom Moore's description of the Whigs upon one occasion—and the same would equally apply to the Tories:

"As bees on flowers alighting cease their hum,  
So, settling upon places, Whigs grow dumb."

I conclude by telling you that the Anti-Corn-Law League, which you have been taught to consider your enemy, is a body of individuals composed of all classes, united in one strong desire that every portion of the people should prosper. I have a business as large as any man in this assembly, and with as much property at stake in it, and I am so convinced of the evil of this law—not to me only, but to you—that if trade were prosperous, which it is not, I would still come among you and tell you that the Corn Law is a curse to agriculture even more blasting than it has ever been to manufacturers.' At Salisbury Mr. Bright spoke with special force and eloquence, and, referring to the evil effects of the Corn Law upon the tenant farmers as compared with its effects upon the manufacturers, said, 'If it has scourged us with thongs, it has lashed you with scorpions.'



It has made your trade fluctuating and hazardous, it has deprived you of political independence, it has surrounded you with discontented and impoverished labourers, it has raised your poor-rates; and by making you compete with each other for farms, it has raised your rents; and all this has been done under cover of professing to protect you. We come among you to ask your assistance in the great struggle we are engaged in, a struggle which will be crowned with complete and early success, a success which will deliver you and our country from the most destructive and disgraceful imposition which any Government ever practised upon any people.'

Mr. Bright also made a tour in the north, from Kelso to Alnwick and Newcastle. The delegates excited hostility in some quarters, but it was reserved for a journal in the last-named town to reach the climax of unscrupulous opposition, by suggesting that Mr. Bright should be violently dealt with. The 'stalwart yeoman,' however, who was called upon to curse Mr. Bright, and to lay hands upon him, ended by blessing the delegate, who had convinced him by his arguments of the soundness of Free-trade principles.

In the House of Commons, Mr. Villiers brought on as usual this session his motion for the abolition of the Corn Laws. Peel defended the laws, though more in an apologetic than a positive fashion. After the Premier's speech, Mr. Milner Gibson moved the adjournment of the debate, whereupon a disgraceful scene ensued, in which the Protectionists were the chief actors. The House resembled a menagerie; there was cock-crowing in its highest perfection, the bleat of the calf, the bray of the ass, the hiss of the goose, together with divers supplemental sounds, which Mr. Cobden, with strict and impartial justice, described as the most extraordinary and inhuman noises he had ever heard. The two party leaders, Sir Robert Peel and Lord John Russell, left the House, and the belligerents became fiercer and wilder than ever. The Speaker's voice was a mere whisper in the Babel of sounds. It was not until they were quite worn out by their exertions that the majority yielded to the adjournment of the debate. On the fifth night Mr. Cobden spoke very effectively, exposing the fallacies of the Protectionists, and showing the evils of the existing law; but Mr. Villiers' motion was lost by

381 to 125. In the minority, however, were several prominent and ex-official Whigs, including Lord Howick, Mr. Charles Buller, Mr. Ellice, Sir George Grey, Mr. Fox Maule, and Mr. Macaulay.

In the course of some two months after this debate, Mr. Bright was elected member for Durham under circumstances detailed in a previous chapter.

The Council of the League, towards the close of 1843, issued an address to the people of the United Kingdom, giving an account of the work that had been done during the year. From this it appeared that there were employed in the printing and making up of the electoral packets of tracts upwards of three hundred persons, while more than five hundred others were engaged in distributing them from house to house in the constituencies. Amongst the parliamentary electors alone of England and Scotland there had been distributed five millions of tracts and stamped publications. Besides these, there was a general distribution among the working classes, and others who were not electors, to the number of 3,600,000. Altogether, the number of tracts, stamped publications, &c., issued by the Council during the year amounted to 9,026,000, or in weight upwards of one hundred tons. Fourteen lecturers, employed in England, Wales, and Scotland, had delivered about 650 lectures during the year.

A vacancy having arisen in the representation of London through the death of Sir Matthew Wood, the Free Traders brought forward a candidate in the person of Mr. Pattison, who was opposed by Mr. T. Baring, as the representative of the Conservatives and the monopolists. The election excited great interest, the League most warmly supporting its candidate, and regarding the contest as one between opposing sets of principles. Mr. Bright described the plain and simple test as the complete, total, and immediate abolition of the monopoly of food. 'In this vast metropolis,' he said, 'where there are nearly two millions of inhabitants, probably not less a sum than six or eight millions sterling is wrung from your resources in different ways, not going into the pockets of the landlords, but being lost by the way, a great portion of it in order that their extortion may keep up a veil on its horrid countenance, and have something of the show of legitimate taxation, instead of being apparent and

downright plunder. There will, in a very short period, be an opportunity for you to show decidedly that the principle of Free Trade is consecrated in your hearts and guides your votes.' The Free Trade candidate triumphed, the numbers at the close of the poll being, Pattison, 6535; Baring, 6334.

It was determined now to raise a fund of £100,000 to further the objects of the League. At a meeting in Manchester there was subscribed towards this sum £12,500, many firms contributing £500 each. The *Times* alarmed the monopolists by the admissions it made in a leading article published on November 18. 'The League is a great fact,' it observed. 'It would be foolish—nay, rash—to deny its importance. It is a great fact that there should have been created in the homesteads of our manufactures a confederacy devoted to the agitation of one political question, persevering at it year after year, shrinking from no trouble, dismayed by no danger, making light of every obstacle.' After mentioning other facts, the article continued: 'No moralist can disregard them; no politician can sneer at them; no statesman can undervalue them. He who collects opinions must chronicle them; he who frames laws must to some extent consult them.' The aspect of things had certainly changed when the *Times* could confess that a new power had arisen in the State—changed, that is, in the eyes of those who based their opinions upon the information and guidance furnished by the daily press.

On the 1st of January 1844, the Marquis of Westminster gave in his adhesion to the movement. Writing to Mr. G. Wilson, he said, 'I have much pleasure in sending a contribution of £500 to your fund, and I venture to express a hope that you will not relax your endeavours until you have obtained from Government, in whatever hands it may happen to be, the fullest measure of Free Trade compatible with what is due to the maintenance of public credit.' The organisation now numbered amongst its supporters, as Mr. Prentice remarks, the wealthiest individual of the monied interest, Mr. Jones Loyd; the wealthiest of the manufacturers, Mr. Marshall, of Leeds; and the wealthiest of noblemen, the Marquis of Westminster. The Earl of Carlisle (then Lord Morpeth) wished

success to the League, although he did not completely identify himself in detail with its principles. His lordship, however, attended a great West Riding demonstration, held at Wakefield, on behalf of the League. At the banquet Mr. Bright was called upon to propose 'The Abolition of the Sugar and all other Monopolies,' and in doing so he thus referred both to Lord Morpeth's attitude and the general question:—'I listened to his lordship's description of some portion of his journey on the American continent; to the glowing language in which he spoke of those vast prairies, which seemed as though countless ages had passed since the vast ocean flowed over them, and had by some omnipotent fiat been at once suspended and changed into the solid earth; and I heard his description of those great rivers which rise no one knows how, or where, and that are in future times to be highways from the ocean to the people who may inhabit their banks. I was pleased to hear all this; and when he spoke of the surplus produce of those vast countries, and of the want there is in this country, I confess I did feel disappointed that any bar should be proposed or permitted to be put which should in any degree narrow the market and the circle out of which we might obtain a supply for the hungry people of this country. A small fixed duty might not be insurmountable by the corn-growers of the nearest country; but to America, distant three thousand miles, and to those vast prairies, distant five thousand miles, a fixed duty of very small amount would operate generally as an insurmountable barrier to a constant trade in corn between this country and that. I will not enter more into this part of the question. The League has put its hand to the plough, and it will not turn back.'

Twice during the session of 1844 the Corn Law question was raised in the House of Commons. On the 12th of March, Mr. Cobden moved for a committee to inquire into the effects of protective duties on agricultural tenants and labourers. The hon. member supported his demand by facts and statistics bearing upon the condition of the population. Mr. Gladstone opposed the motion, on the grounds that such a committee would cause apprehension, and that it could not usefully deal with the subjects opened

up by the mover. Mr. Bright spoke in favour of the motion. Though the persons who thought with Mr. Cobden and himself, he remarked, might be few in that House, they were many and influential in the country. He and his party had been charged with exciting the people. He did not deny it; they had excited the people, and should continue to do so. No evil had ever found redress until agitation had compelled it. The Corn Law, ever since 1815, had been a fraud upon the tenants, for they had been led to believe that the effect of it would be to maintain an average price of 80s. per quarter. Indeed, every prophecy of the agricultural soothsayers had failed of fulfilment. The Protectionists had made many misrepresentations, either from ignorance or from some worse cause. He besought the House to take into immediate consideration the distress of the agricultural labourers, which he believed to extend throughout the southern counties of England, and over Wales and Scotland. He dwelt particularly on the evils prevalent in Dorsetshire, the state of which county was, in his opinion, a clear proof of the inefficiency of the Corn Law to produce agricultural prosperity. The increase of population would in a few years force the repeal of that law, unless the Legislature had the wisdom to repeal it earlier.

Mr. Bright made a strong point when he told the House that if the majority thought the justice of the Corn Law could be proved, they would grant the committee at once. There was only one way, he said in conclusion, by which this question could be carried, and that was by making it thoroughly known to the country. 'When they exposed the bad principles of this law, they exposed also the most unwise policy of the agricultural members of that House; and passing from county to county, and town to town, the constituents of this empire should know that the landowners sat in that House, if not with an express desire and design, yet they did sit there, resisting any attempt, however small, to affect the price of the produce of land, with determined opposition, and maintaining a law the object of which was to prevent a reduction of rent; and when millions throughout the country asked for an inquiry into the subject, they did not hesitate to vote as if they were a corporation

sitting there to support their own interests, and keep up the rent of land.'

Mr. Cobden's motion was lost by 224 votes to 133. On the 25th of June, Mr. Villiers brought forward his annual motion by a series of resolutions, which Mr. Gladstone said the Government would meet with a direct negative. Mr. Bright, in supporting the motion, said: 'I am convinced that, whatever may be the feelings of confidence now entertained by the right hon. baronet (Sir R. Peel), whenever bad harvests again occur, he will either abolish this law, or his Government will be overthrown, as was the Government he succeeded by the bad harvests we have lately suffered from. I do not wish this law to be repealed in times of excitement, nor do I wish its destruction to be achieved as a great party victory; I would rather it were for ever abolished by the unanimous verdict of the honest and intelligent classes of the country. We should regard it as a question of great national interest, not as one affecting our own profits or property; we should legislate upon it in such a manner that, laying our hands upon our hearts, we may say that we have dealt with it upon great and just principles, with an honest regard to the common good, and not merely with regard to the claims of a particular interest.' Although Mr. Villiers' proposition was lost by 328 to 124, in less than two years from its utterance the Premier fulfilled Mr. Bright's prediction.

The League having been unable to make arrangements for the continuance of their weekly meetings in Drury Lane Theatre, now hired the theatre in Covent Garden for that purpose. In the latter house, many enthusiastic assemblies gathered to listen to the stirring oratory of Mr. Cobden, Mr. Fox, Mr. Bright, and other leaders in the movement. At one of these meetings Mr. Cobden announced that it was not the intention of the League to recommend any further petitioning to the existing House of Commons. The audience rose and enthusiastically applauded this announcement, as well as the further statement by the speaker to the effect that when such a point had been reached as would justify the step, the Council would recommend the electors to memorialise the Queen in favour of the immediate dissolution of Parliament.

Mr. Bright, in a long address, said that while viewing that great meeting as a pleasant proof of the progress of the cause, it was nevertheless somewhat humiliating to think that an assembly of four or five thousand people should be required to be called together at this time of day to protest against a law so evidently bad and unjust as the Corn Law, and to assert a right so clear and evident as that which they wished to gain for the people—perfect freedom for their industry. They asserted this principle—that every man had a right to the fruits of his own industry, and a right to exchange it with any other man; a right to dispose of it wherever he could get most for it. Mr. Bright next dealt with the argument of the *Standard* that there was a great improvement in trade, and therefore that repeal was not called for. Admitting this temporary improvement, he asked, ‘Would not bad harvests return again? Had there been any revelation from heaven saying that in future the earth should always yield abundantly? Would not the return of bad harvests bring with it the return of all the calamities from which he trusted some portion of the people were now escaping? And if they had suffered so much for five years past—if honourable men had become bankrupts from no fault of their own, and if multitudes of honest, industrious, and meritorious artisans had been driven into the degradation of pauperism, and not a few into crime, through the pressure of these Corn and Provision Laws,—if that was so, was it to be thought that they who had put their hands to the plough would now turn back from the work?’ Lancashire at present enjoyed a little sunshine, but the prospects in Ireland were very unpleasant for the monopolists. After referring to the miserable condition of the farmers in England, the speaker continued: ‘The monopolist landowners tried to keep their tenantry away from meetings where they might hear the Corn Law discussed. And why? For the same reason that they tried to shut up Drury Lane Theatre. They did not wish to have the matter touched; they felt that it would not bear handling, that it would not bear to be examined. They knew that the pretences on which the Corn and Provision Laws were maintained were unfounded and dishonest. They wished their tenants, therefore, not to hear the matter dis-

cussed ; but they were greatly deceived if they flattered themselves that the farmers would not make amends for their exclusion from hearing by reading, for the report of this meeting would be sent to nearly every occupying farmer in some one or more of the counties of England.'

Yet there were not wanting members of the aristocracy who had considerable sympathy with the League. Some of them were not only Corn Law repealers, but Free-traders in the widest sense of the word. The members of the League wanted to have this question settled for the world as well as for England. 'They were tired of what were called the natural divisions of empires. They wanted not that the Channel should separate this country from France ; they hoped and wished that Frenchmen and Englishmen should no longer consider each other as naturally hostile nations. It was common to speak of rivers, and mountains, and seas as the natural divisions of countries, separating one nation from another, from all time and for all time ; but there was no barrier which nature had reared which was a thousandth part so detrimental to the interests of mankind, or so much calculated to embitter their feelings and promote hostilities, as were those miserable unnatural barriers which legal restrictions on trade had imposed, and which were upheld by lines of custom-houses between nation and nation.'

Mr. Bright said it was terrible to think that the Queen of the United Kingdom should be wielding a sceptre, not over twenty-seven millions of happy and independent people, but over three or four and twenty millions living as they best could, and over four millions of absolute and hopeless paupers. The League, he said, would stand between these helpless beings and their oppressors ; and he thus concluded : 'We have a perfect faith in the beauty, excellence, and perfection of the principles we promulgate ; and we know that Heaven will prosper those who are working in a cause that shall bless the world ; and we know that the promises of Omnipotence are to those who bless His creatures, and who bring happiness to their hearts and homes. We shall go onward, then ; we shall have no slackening in our ranks because cotton is a little dearer than it was. We did not buckle on our armour for a sham



contest. We ourselves were not hungering ; I never had a meal the less, however many of my countrymen were suffering, and my business has always yielded some profit. We have no other motive to action than the wish to do away with this cruel injustice. Our opponents know that they are unjust, and they now know that we know it ; and we are resolved that the millions amongst whom we live shall no longer be trampled on by the iron hoof of monopoly. We have fought this battle with the confidence of success, and we know that success awaits us, for we remember in faith and gratitude that royal lips have declared by the inspiration of the Eternal Spirit that "the needy shall not alway be forgotten ; the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever."

The harvest of 1844 having been better than usual, and the price of bread being comparatively low, there was a slight lull in the Free-trade agitation. But the League, knowing that it was fallacious to build hopes of a permanent improvement without repeal, now addressed themselves to another and a very important task—that of purging the electoral registers. For three or four months this task was pursued, and on the 24th of October a meeting was held in the Manchester Free Trade Hall to hear the result. Mr. George Wilson produced a detailed account of the great gains to the Free-trade party in the registration for every borough in Lancashire, and stated that in sixty-eight boroughs in other parts of the kingdom there had been similar gains. The registration list for the county of Lancaster had also been revised, with the result that it gave to the Leaguers a seat for South Lancashire, and a gain of 533 votes for North Lancashire, leaving the monopolists three seats in the boroughs, or five out of the whole twenty-six members for the entire county. In the history of registration there had never been so complete a sweep of a county as that.

This new development of League policy naturally spread alarm amongst the monopolists, and this alarm was increased by a suggestion of Mr. Cobden that there was an opening for a great increase in the number of forty-shilling freeholds, thus enabling probably the repealers to gain many of the counties. It was felt that every county possessing a large town population might be won,

if the people could be roused to a systematic effort to qualify themselves for the vote in the way in which the South Lancashire people had reached the qualification.

Mr. Bright was especially earnest upon the one point, that it was a false security to believe that the comparative prosperity then enjoyed was likely to be permanent. Providence might give them one, two, or three more good harvests ; but the course of the seasons could not be changed to suit the caprice, the folly, or the criminality of human legislation. The speaker added :—

‘As we have had before, so shall we have again, a change of seasons ; and when that change shall come, and if the people of this country have not, in the meantime, bestirred themselves and shaken off this iniquitous impost, I ask you, whom will you blame but yourselves, and where can you run for refuge ? for your own folly will have led you into danger, and by your own neglect alone will you have allowed these evils again to come upon you. You will again have to suffer those evils which arise from the price of bread rising all over the country. The consumption by the great mass of the people of all kinds of manufactured goods will be greatly crippled ; you will again have a great exportation of gold, and a great derangement of the monetary affairs of the country ; you will again have numbers of merchants and manufacturers going rapidly, week after week, into the *Gazette* ; you will again have your shopkeepers impoverished ; and, worst of all, you will again have the labourers of this district, our honest and industrious artisans, plunged into all that distress which we have lately witnessed ; and, arising from that distress, discontent and disaffection, and a brutalising and barbarising of the minds of the people, such as they have suffered from for the last half a dozen years, and which they are now only partially getting rid of. It is impossible to draw a picture too gloomy of that which we have already seen in this district, and it is much less possible to draw a picture of that which must come if we neglect the power that we have in our hands to wipe away these infamous laws. I am sure we have the power ; the statements made by our chairman to-night prove that we have the power. The Reform Act never has been worked by either the Liberal or Free-trade party in this country. It may be a bad bill ; it has flaws enough, we all know ; it has pitfalls many for us, and it has privileges far too many for our opponents. But for all that, if we will only work it, I am persuaded there is within it enough of the popular principle to enable us to amend it, if need be, and to do many other things which we may think necessary for our welfare.’

The registration and freehold movement received considerable impetus by a meeting held in Covent Garden Theatre on December 12th. Mr. Villiers spoke confidently, firmly persuaded that victory was not far distant ; and Mr. Cobden was equally hopeful, changing Sir Robert Peel’s well-known adjuration to ‘Register’ into ‘Qualify,

qualify, qualify !' Mr. Bright, who was even more eloquent than usual, said that his hope was brighter than ever—his faith undimmed by the smallest shadow of a doubt. In a great struggle, in the long run, the just always wins, and he must have read very little history who did not know that liberty was triumphing. Freedom, Heaven's first gift to man, was still living, breathing, growing, and every day increasing in strength. 'This freedom for which you struggle is the freedom to live; it is the right to eat your bread by the sweat of your brow. It is the freedom which was given to you even in the primeval curse; and shall man make that curse more bitter to his fellow-man? No; instead of despairing, I have more confidence and faith than ever. I believe that those old delusions and superstitions which, like venomous and polluted rags, have disfigured the fair form of this country's greatness, are now fast dropping away. I think I behold the dawn of a brighter day; all around are the elements of a mighty movement. We stand as on the very threshold of a new career; and may we not say that this League—this great and growing confederacy of those who love justice and hate oppression—has scattered, broadcast throughout the land, seed from which shall spring forth ere long an abundant, a glorious harvest of true greatness for our country, and of permanent happiness for mankind?'

Meetings, attended by deputations from the League, followed at Liverpool, Bradford, Sheffield, Wakefield, Bolton, Manchester, Warrington, Preston, Oldham, Blackburn, Durham, &c. Mr. Bright spoke at many of these meetings, and at all, the constitutional movement for the increase of the forty-shilling freeholders was warmly welcomed.

Before the meeting of Parliament in 1845, several large and influential free-trade meetings were held. At the first of these meetings, held in Covent Garden Theatre on the 15th of January, Mr. Milner Gibson said he agreed with the *Morning Post* that the only difference between the policy which Sir Robert Peel was prepared to pursue and the policy of the League was this—that Sir Robert's was a slow decay of gradual poverty saddened by disappointed hopes, while the policy of the League was prompt as the guillotine—but







THE LATE RIGHT HONOURABLE RICHARD COBDEN

Thomas G. Carr London & Edinburgh



both were forms of extinction. Mr. Cobden said that he and his friends were anxious to guard themselves against this—that Sir Robert Peel should not mix up the question of Free Trade with his dexterity in finance. Let it be understood that they would have nothing to do with mystification and shuffling. Theirs was a very simple and plain proposition. They said to the right hon. baronet, ‘Abolish the monopolies which go to enrich that majority which placed you in power and keeps you there.’ A satisfactory annual aggregate meeting of the Liverpool Anti-Monopoly Association was held a few days later. The objects of the meeting are sufficiently indicated by the title of the Association. On the 22d of January the annual aggregate meeting of the League was held in the Free Trade Hall. The report stated that there was an undoubted gain upon the register in regard to 112 boroughs, and that in many of these the improvement was such as to ensure the return of free-traders in the place of monopolists, in the event of an election. The council had further reason to believe that within the past three months a sufficient number of persons had purchased freehold qualifications in North Cheshire, South Lancashire, and the West Riding of York, to secure to those important constituencies a free-trade majority; whilst a large addition had been made to the ranks of the repealers in Middlesex, North Lancashire, and several other populous counties. Besides this, the usual operations of the League had not been allowed to suffer, but had rather increased than otherwise. Of the fund of £100,000 proposed to be raised, upwards of £82,000 had already been received; and after all the expenses of the agitation had been met, there was still a balance in hand of £26,675.

On the following day, the first dinner of the Sussex Agricultural Protection Society took place at Brighton. The Duke of Richmond presided, and was supported by several members of both Houses of Parliament. The Earl of Egmont asked whether any man could read the speeches made by free-traders, and not believe that the whole foundation of their proceedings was revolution. He and his friends had now hoisted the flag of protection to agriculture, and they would bid defiance to the Anti-Corn-Law League. Mr. Stafford O’Brien predicted, as amongst the results of Free Trade, that whole



districts would be thrown out of cultivation, and that estates would be brought to the hammer. The Duke of Richmond said that so long as he had blood in his veins he would stand up for the agricultural interest.

Parliament opened on the 4th of February, the Queen's speech alluding to the prospect of continued peace, and the general state of domestic prosperity and tranquillity. In the debate on the Address in the Commons, Lord John Russell said he was convinced that protection was not the support but the bane of agriculture. He considered, both with respect to Ireland and the question of Free Trade, that the Government ought to take advantage of the present tranquil time. His lordship, in one point, took the same view as Mr. Bright, viz., that two or three bad harvests would cause such popular excitement as would force a change in spite of all resistance. Nor must it be forgotten that at this time Peel himself had already said that we ought to buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest; while Sir James Graham had declared that Free-trade principles were the principles of common sense.

Sir Robert Peel produced his Budget on the 14th of February. There was a surplus of £3,409,000, which he proposed to devote to the reduction of the sugar duty, the abolition of the duty on glass, cotton, wool, and on the importation of Baltic staves. It was also proposed to abolish the duty on all those articles which merely yielded nominal amounts, a step which would sweep away 430 articles from the tariff. Lord John Russell's amendment on one of the Budget resolutions, censuring the distinction between free-labour and slave-labour sugar as illusory, and detrimental to the revenue, was lost by a majority of 94; and Mr. Milner Gibson was also defeated in his resolution in favour of an equalisation of duty on foreign and colonial sugar.

The Budget excited considerable opposition, for what the Minister gave with one hand he took away with the other. The proposals were discussed at an aggregate League meeting in Covent Garden Theatre, and those parts of the new ministerial measures which were founded on Free-trade principles were approved. Mr. Bright spoke at this meeting, sarcastically describing the farmers'

friends in both Houses of Parliament. Then turning to their own organisation, he said they had no alliance with lords or dukes. The prominent men of the League were men from the ranks. From their very beginning they placed no reliance but on the omnipotence of truth, and the intelligence and virtue of their countrymen. To them they had again and again appealed, and nobly had those appeals been responded to. In 1839 they first asked for subscriptions, and £5000 was given. In 1840 between £7000 and £8000 was subscribed. In 1841 they held the great conference at Manchester, at which upwards of 700 ministers of religion attended. In 1842 they had their grand bazaar in Manchester, from which £10,000 was realised. In 1843 they asked for £50,000, and got it. In 1844 they called for £100,000, and between £80,000 and £90,000 had been paid in, besides what would be received from the bazaar to be held in May. This year was young, but they had not been idle. There had been invested a sum of not less than £250,000 in the purchase of county qualifications. With regard to the bazaar, a great deal was being done, and a great deal more could and would be done before the time, in order to produce a display which he hoped would be so remarkable as to be worth a visit from the highest personage in the realm.

In the House of Commons, on the 7th of March, Mr. Cobden moved for a select committee to inquire into the causes and extent of the alleged existing agricultural distress, and into the effects of legislative protection upon the interests of landowners, tenant farmers, and farm labourers. Having adduced a mass of information and statistics in support of his demand, the hon. gentleman said, 'I have no hesitation in telling you, that if you give me a committee of this House, I will explode the delusion of agricultural protection. I will bring forward such a mass of evidence, and give you such a preponderance of talent and authority, that when the Blue Book is published and sent forth to the world, as we can now send it by our vehicles of information, your system of protection shall not live in public opinion for two years afterwards.' Was that old tattered flag of protection, he asked, tarnished and torn, to be kept hoisted still in the counties for the benefit of politicians, or

would they come forward honestly and fairly to inquire into this system? He could not believe that the gentry of England would be made mere drumheads on this question, to be sounded upon by others. The country gentlemen could, if they pleased, have on the committee a majority of members of the Central Association.

Mr. Sidney Herbert, speaking for the Government, opposed the inquiry, saying that they could not countenance a committee which had no other object in view than to provide means for further agitation.

Mr. Bright supported the motion, speaking incisively against the Corn Laws, and contending that it was clear from their past history that all protection had been unavailing to keep up the price of corn. Turning upon those agricultural members who were subservient to the Government, he said he would ask them one question, 'Did they believe that the farmers would have voted for them at the last election if they had declared at the hustings they would support measures which would bring down the price of corn from 61s. a quarter, which it was then, to 45s. a quarter, which it was now? And yet this they had done, in voting first for Sir Robert Peel's alterations in the Corn Laws, and afterwards for his alterations in the tariff. As protection had hitherto done them little, or rather no good, he recommended them to go into committee, and inquire whether it would not be for their advantage to abandon protection entirely.' Mr. Bright added that no one could deny that the tendency of the country was towards Free Trade.

But the country gentlemen believed only too implicitly that Mr. Cobden could explode protection, and so they voted against him. The motion was lost by 213 to 121, or a majority of 92.

On the 8th of May, the great Bazaar in connection with the League was opened in Covent Garden Theatre. It created, as Mr. Prentice says, an interest 'scarcely inferior to that which was felt at a later and happier period at the opening of the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park.' The London newspapers of all shades of opinion were filled with descriptions of the affair. The appearance of the building was very novel and striking. Instead of the horseshoe sweep of boxes with Grecian scrolls terminating at the massive

pillars of the proscenium, the long perspective of a Gothic hall stretched across pit and stage; the vista of slender columns and Tudor arches terminating in a mimic painted window. The roof was bright with gay colours, produced by transparent painting; and in lieu of heraldic blazonry, escutcheons charged with a bunch of wheat-ears on an azure field, and inscribed with the motto, 'Free'—the badge of the League—were seen in every direction. Gothic lanterns of gay colours shed light upon the moving throng that filled the gangways, and on the heaps of manufactured articles piled up and hanging down on every side. The contributions from each town occupied a separate stall—Manchester alone having three stalls. The articles offered for sale were of the most varied description, and at one stall there was a veritable lock of Sir Walter Scott's hair offered for the sum of £3, 3s. A post-office was amongst the ingenious devices for raising money, and disseminating free-trade doctrines. Portraits there were in many forms of Messrs. Cobden, Bright, and Villiers. Although the weather was very unfavourable, the bazaar was most successful. The visitors numbered upwards of 100,000; goods to the value of £20,000 were presented for sale, and 400 ladies, the wives and daughters of leading Free-traders, presided at the stalls. The sum of £25,000 was realised towards the funds of the League. The bazaar attracted great attention in the press, many metropolitan journals observing that its influence and significance could not be ignored by politicians opposed to the repeal movement.

On the 10th of June, Mr. Villiers submitted for the last time in the House of Commons his motion for a committee of the whole House to consider his resolutions for the abolition of all restrictions on the importation of foreign corn. At the close of a long and able speech, Mr. Villiers said he was at a loss to know what plea would now be urged by the Government in reply to his demand, on behalf of the people, for free access to the means of subsistence. If the Government should either plead the pressure of local taxation, or the peculiar burdens on land, he would reply, 'Bring us in at once an account of what is paid on those scores, and we will show that it is far less than the loss which the people sustain every year owing

to the restriction of their supply of food.' He called upon the Government to indemnify the landlords in any way they pleased except that of making the food of the people dear.

Sir James Graham, of whom some hopes had been entertained by the Free-traders, met the motion with a decided negative. He advocated a gradual and cautious policy in legislation affecting the Corn Laws; and said it was his conviction that suddenly and at once to throw open the trade in corn would be inconsistent with the well-being of the community, and would give such a shock to the agricultural interest as would throw many other interests into a state of convulsion.

Mr. Bright expressed his surprise at the Home Secretary's speech, and said he was at a loss to discover whether it was intended to give more hope to the Opposition, or more consolation to the Ministerial side of the House. Sir James had evidently been endeavouring to say one thing in one part of his speech, and to unsay it in the next. In the commencement he had been a furious Free-trader; in the close he had brought forward in a mass all the fallacies of the Protection Society. It was time that this imposture should cease; for so long as it prevailed the country would be involved in a perpetual agitation. The question of the repeal of the Corn Laws was now only one of time. He would score off every part of Sir James Graham's speech after that sentence of it which contained the enunciation that Free Trade was the key-stone of Sir Robert Peel's policy. Let the county members reflect upon that, and let them remember that if Sir Robert Peel gave the word for the repeal of the Corn Laws, they had no power to prevent it. Replying to the objection that the abolition of the Corn Laws would cause a suspension of labour, Mr. Bright asked, Did the right hon. baronet know that the whole number of persons who were engaged in producing the 2,000,000 quarters of corn he spoke of were not as great as the number of persons who were thrown out of employment probably in one town in this country by the state of things caused by this monopoly, like Sheffield, Leeds, or Stockport? Addressing the agriculturists, he adduced numerous instances of greatly increased importation of articles, the produce of the soil, which had not at all

injured the interests of agriculture. He again warned them that there was a strong feeling in the country against protection, which it would not be wise to despise. The hon. member then gave a history of the Anti-Corn-Law League, the annual contributions to which had increased from £5000 in the year of its birth to £110,000 in the present year. His allusion to the Covent Garden Bazaar having been sneered at, he said there was one person who would not sneer at it, and that was Sir Robert Peel. Mr. Bright thus concluded his speech :—

‘An hon. member opposite had lately given to the world a book in which he represented the monarch of this country as reigning over two nations, the rich and the poor,\* and there was a great deal of truth in that. Others talked of the widening of the separation between the very rich and the very poor. The Corn Law created nothing; it blighted almost everything. There was an abundance of capital, of labour, and of material in this country, but there wanted an honest distribution of it; and that honest distribution could only be given upon those just, true, and immutable principles which the great Creator had given for the regulation of the ordinary affairs of life. He knew that on going to a division his party would be in a minority of course, but he also knew that minorities in that House often became majorities; and if a man advocated a sound principle, and knew that millions out of doors supported it, let him not be deterred because the teller gave a majority against it, instead of in its favour. They had seen good principles growing, growing, growing, because everybody supported them; and bad principles fading away, and those who formerly adhered to them ashamed to recall them. If they wanted this law to be maintained on its principle, they should have prevented Caxton from erecting his press in Westminster Abbey, they should have placed an interdict upon Chambers, proscribed Knight’s weekly volumes, and put down all newspapers, and, above all, put a stop to those locomotive engines which came up from Manchester to the metropolis in four hours and a half.’

Mr. Cobden complained that the questions mooted by Mr. Villiers had not been met. These were, first, Had they a right to restrict the supply of food for the people? secondly, Was it true that they had a law to that effect? and, thirdly, If their Corn Law was not to that effect, what was its purpose? By careful calculations made, he supported Mr. Villiers’ propositions. Lord John Russell pointed out the inconsistencies of Sir James Graham, and said that the Corn Law, as it now stood, was vicious in principle, and could not long be maintained in its present condition. He felt himself at

\* *Sybil; or, The Two Nations.* By Benjamin Disraeli, M.P.

liberty to go into committee with Mr. Villiers, and to consider in what way a relaxation of the law could be made. Sir Robert Peel said that if he could believe in the predictions of Mr. Cobden, his objections to an immediate repeal of the Corn Law would be greatly alleviated ; but he could not, and therefore must proceed gradually with legislation.

On the division being taken, there appeared for the motion, 122 ; against, 254 ; majority against repeal, 132. These numbers indicated a still increasing support to Mr. Villiers' proposition. With those who paired or were absent, there were now 190 members in favour of Free Trade, as compared with 165 in the year 1844.

Confident as the members of the League were, however, of the coming triumph of their cause, there was probably not one amongst them who thought it was so immediate, so close at hand, as it actually was. Precipitating causes—such causes as Mr. Cobden and Mr. Bright had again and again said must bring matters to an issue—were already at work to force on repeal ; and the curtain was destined shortly to rise on the last act of the great Parliamentary drama in connection with the Corn Laws.











